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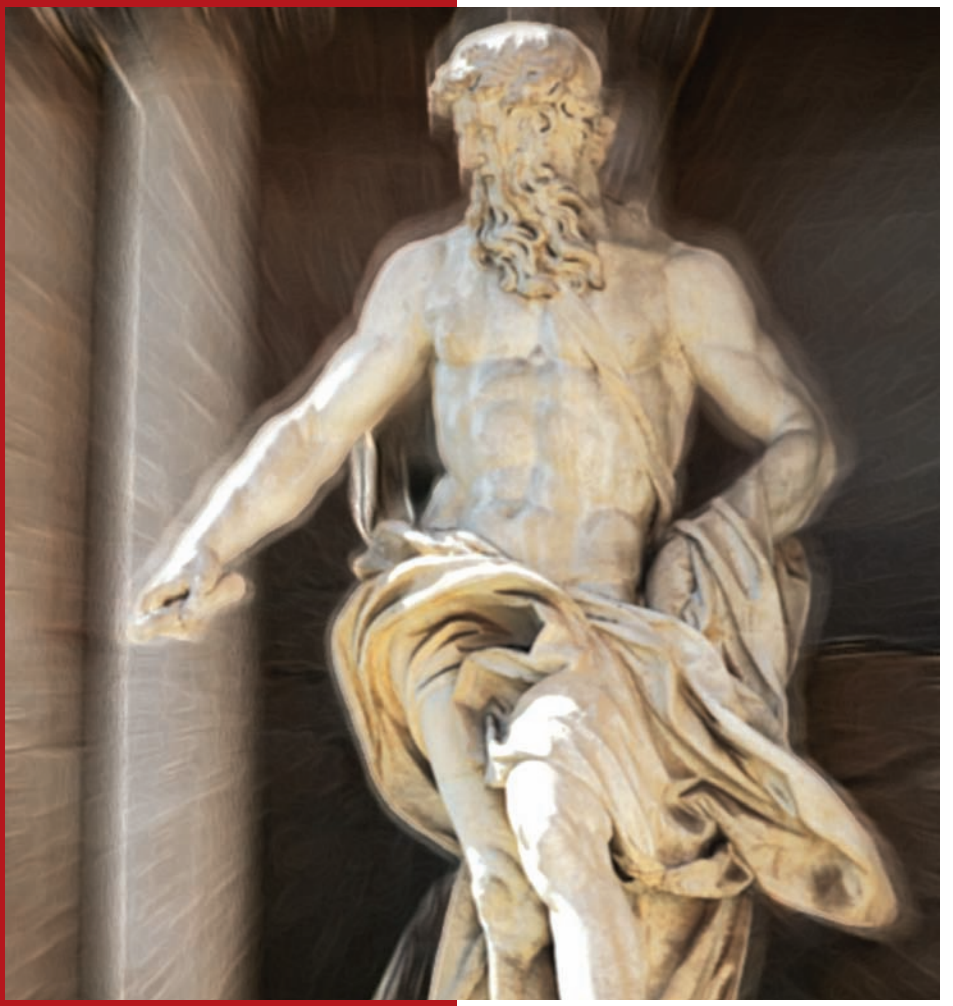
CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY: THE ROMANS

COURSE GUIDE



Professor Peter W. Meineck
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Classical Mythology:
The Romans

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Course Syllabus

Classical Mythology: The Romans

About Your Professor

Peter W. Meineck

Peter W. Meineck is a clinical assistant professor of classics and artist in residence at the New York University Center for Ancient Studies and the producing artistic director and founder of the Aquila Theatre Company. Peter currently teaches in the Classics Department at New York University in ancient drama, Greek literature, and classical mythology. He has held teaching appointments at Princeton University, the University of South Carolina, and the Tisch School of the Arts. Fellowships include the Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies, Princeton, the University of California at San Diego, and the University of Texas at Austin. He has lectured and held workshops on ancient drama and Shakespeare at conferences, academic institutions, museums, festivals, and schools throughout the world.

Peter's publications include Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (Hackett Cambridge, 1998); *Aristophanes Vol. 1 - Clouds, Wasps, Birds* (Hackett Cambridge, 1998); Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* with Paul Woodruff (Hackett Cambridge, 2000); Aristophanes' *Clouds* (Hackett Cambridge, 2000); and *The Theban Plays* with Paul Woodruff (Hackett Cambridge, 2002).

He has translated several Greek plays for the stage (*Clouds, Wasps*, *Birds*, Philoctetes' *Ajax*, *Agamemnon*, and *Oedipus the King*). He founded Aquila in 1991 after working extensively in West End theatre, including the Aldwych, the Almeida, the English National Opera, the Phoenix, the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Opera House, and Sadler's Wells. Peter trained as a lighting designer and has lit and co-designed many Aquila shows.

His work as a director includes Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*; Sophocles' *Ajax*; a new play, *Villain*, which he also co-wrote; Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*; and Aristophanes' *Wasps*.

Introduction

Rome grew from a tiny community of small hill villages near the River Tiber in central Italy to one of the most powerful empires the world has seen. The renegade hamlets of Romulus and Remus became the imperial city of the divine Augustus, ruling over an empire of sixty million subjects stretching from Scotland to North Africa and from Portugal to Armenia and from the German Rhineland to the Egyptian Nile.

The Romans themselves believed that their great city was founded in the middle of the eighth century BCE. By the middle of the second century CE, Rome had a population of 1.5 million; Alexandria, in Egypt, 500,000; and Londinium, in Briton, 30,000. Not counting locally recruited forces, this vast empire was subjugated and policed with only around twenty-five legions, or the equivalent of only three and a half times the entire police force of New York City.

How was this possible? Military power, colonial organization, superior technology, a well-organized infrastructure, and a cohesive economic system. These elements of Roman genius are well known, but it was the very idea of Rome that proved so persuasive and this Roman ideal was born from mythology.

Lecture 1:
Mythological Rome

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read John Boardman's (et al) *The Oxford History of the Roman World* (chapter 1: "Early Rome and Italy" and chapter 2: "The Expansion of Rome").

The Study of Roman Myth

This course will describe and analyze Roman mythology and discuss the uses of myth in Roman history, religion, literature, art, and politics. The course is organized in such a way as to develop a detailed understanding of the form and function of Roman mythology relating to primary source material, historical reference, and cultural discussion.

We will be discussing the following major topics in the course of the next fourteen lectures:

- Introduction to Roman mythology
- The sources of Roman myth
- Greek myths and the Romans
- Arcadian myths and the Romans
- Trojan Ancestors—Aeneas before Virgil
- Romulus and Remus
- The seven kings of Rome
- Etruscan kings in Rome—myths of history?
- Myths of the New Republic
- Myths of Roman expansion
- Virgil's *Aeneid*
- Myths of metamorphosis—Ovid, imperial mythmaking and the survival of classical mythology

Roman Mythology

Mythos is a Greek term that means spoken story or speech, whereas *logos* implies an account in which the teller of a *logos* takes personal responsibility for the content of what is said. A *mythos* is a traditional story from the Latin *trad*—to hand over. Myths develop in an oral culture, whereas stories with a collective importance to a given community are told and told again.

The term "classical mythology" is used to describe the mythic traditions of Greece and Rome. However, most studies in this area concentrate more fully on the mythology of Greece and view Rome as a secondary source of mythological material influenced by and reacting to Greek mythology.

Certainly, as we will see, the influence of Greek mythology on the Romans was profound, but Roman mythology also has its place in revealing much about the nature of Roman culture, particularly as Rome was developing from a small city-state to a flourishing republic and then a major imperial power.

A study of Roman myth offers something vital in the study of the importance of mythology: the opportunity to understand the purpose of a myth as we see it transform and mutate under differing social and political conditions.

The Geography of Rome

The Romans developed from an Indo-European population that probably arrived in Italy from central Europe sometime during the Bronze Age, around 1600 BCE. There is archaeological evidence of human settlement in the region that became Rome from this period.

The Italian Peninsula juts out into the Mediterranean Sea and resembles a large boot, with its toe looking as if it is just about to kick the island of Sicily from its strategically important position off the coast of north Africa into the Western Mediterranean Sea.

The Italian peninsula is divided from mainland Europe by the Alps and Dolomite mountains in the north, which border modern-day Switzerland. These were predominantly Celtic regions and were known to the Romans as Transalpine Gaul.

The fertile Po Valley lies to the south, bordered by the Rubicon River.

The center of Italy is cut by the Apennine Mountains, stretching from north to south and dividing the east and west coasts. Streaked with mountain rivers leading into coastal plains, the Apennines was populated with fierce mountain tribes such as the Samnites, who clashed with Rome throughout its early history. Rome's position controlling the crossing of the River Tiber north and south and the lucrative salt trading route from the Tiber mouth up into the Apennine Hills helped greatly to secure early geographical domination of the region.

Rome itself developed near the bank of the River Tiber in the western central Italian peninsula, taking advantage of the easily fortified hills of the region. Roman myth places Romulus on the Palatine Hill, which dominated the plain that later contained the Forum. Eventually, Rome came to incorporate seven hills all lying to the east of the Tiber surrounding the Palatine:

1. The Palatine
2. The Aventine
3. The Capitoline
4. The Esquiline
5. The Viminal
6. The Quirinal
7. The Caelian

The Campus Martius (field of Mars) lay to the west of the hills, bordered by a bend in the Tiber, and the large Janiculum Hill, or Hill of Aeneas, lay across the Tiber to the east.

The seven hills of Rome were 100 to 200 feet high, flat-topped and free-standing elevations dominating the surrounding fertile countryside and good pasture land. The earliest settlers in this region seem to have been small-holding farmers and shepherds.

At some point in the fourth century BCE, the Romans developed their own harbor at Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea some sixteen miles away. According to legend, this was Rome's first colony and was founded by the Roman king Ancus Marcius in order to provide salt—a highly valuable commodity in the ancient world. Ostia became of vital strategic importance during the Punic Wars against Carthage in the third and second centuries BCE and then became a major center of maritime trade.

Early Roman History

It is very difficult to reconstruct an accurate early history of Rome. Even though the city of Athens in Greece was documenting its history through the works of historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides, no account of Roman history earlier than the late third century BCE existed. Some Greek writers from the fourth century BCE, such as Aristotle, briefly mention Rome, but we do not have a complete Roman history until the time of Augustus at the beginning of the first century CE.

Archaeology provides clues showing early settlement in Rome from the Bronze Age (ca. 1600 BCE) and the influence and possible settlement from a population based to the south of the Tiber in a region called Latium who knew ironworking and lived on or around the Alban Mount. By around 850 BCE, the Latins dominated the coastal region with their center at the town of Alba Longa on the banks of Lake Albano. To the east were the Sabines, another Indo-European tribe that spoke a slightly different dialect called Oscan and lived on the neighboring Apennine Hills. The relationship between the Latins and the Sabines came to dominate many early Roman myths.

To the north of Rome a distinct culture developed in the region now known as Tuscany. The Etruscan language was not Italic or Greek and their culture seemed to reflect a distinctly Eastern influence. Many scholars have since pondered on these "mysterious" Etruscans and sought to identify them with Phoenician, Trojan, or Anatolian settlers. Archaeological research would suggest otherwise, and the prevailing scholarly consensus is that the Etruscans were a native Italian people who exploited the rich metallurgical wealth of their region and established viable trade links with Greek, Phoenician, and Eastern traders. This brought Etruscan culture into direct contact with the Orientalizing Period of the eighth and seventh century BCE, when the Greek world was becoming heavily influenced by Anatolian culture and artistic representations.

The influence of the Orientalizing Period is seen vividly on Greek vase painting and sculpture, where mythical beasts such as griffins and sphinxes appear, and Greek mythology becomes influenced by the mythic traditions to the East, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as reflected in the popular myths of Herakles.

The traditional date for the foundation of Rome is 747 BCE. This was set by the first Roman historian we know of, a Roman senator from one of the most illustrious families of Rome, Quintus Fabius Pictor. At this time, the Greek world was emerging from the Dark Ages. Because of a population boom brought on by new prosperity and open trade routes, Greek city-states were establishing colonies throughout Sicily and Southern Italy. The Greek

colonies of Magna Graecia traded with the Etruscans to the north and had a massive influence on the Romans.

Rome in the mid-eighth century BCE was surrounded by hostile peoples eager to gain control of the important Tiber River crossing, the lucrative salt route, and the fertile farmlands. There are rapidly developing Etruscan city-states to the north and rich Greek colonies such as Cumae and Tarentum to the south. Also, Rome had to contend with rival Italian tribal groups such as Sabines, Samnites, other Latins, Volscians, and Marsi, to name just a few. By the sixth and fifth centuries, Rome found itself jostling for position in the midst of what must have seemed at the time like the new frontier to the west.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What is the importance of the colony of Ostia in Roman history?
2. What relationship came to dominate early Roman myths?

Suggested Reading

Boardman, John, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray, eds. *The Oxford History of the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Other Books of Interest

Grant, Michael. *Roman Myths*. Chapters 1 and 2. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

Wiseman, Timothy P. *The Myths of Rome*. Exeter (UK): University of Exeter Press, 2004.

Lecture 2:
The Making of Myth:
How the Romans Recorded Their Mythology

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read John Boardman's (et al) *The Oxford History of the Roman World* (chapter 3: "The First Roman Literature" and chapter 10: "Roman Historians").

Our evidence for mythology in Roman society comes from a variety of sources.

Oral Tradition

There may have been a thriving oral tradition in Latin culture, but it has not survived. The evidence suggests that there may indeed have been an indigenous mythology, but the particular circumstances of Rome's historical development and the varied outside cultural influences make the identification of that tradition incredibly difficult. One aspect of the study of the existing Roman myths is to try to identify traditional elements that may have survived despite the adoption of other mythical elements.

Greeks: The Greeks were the strongest cultural influence on Roman mythology, having settled in Magna Graecia (southern Italy and Sicily). Stories such as the Trojan War, the wanderings of Odysseus, the tasks and travels of Herakles and the Battle of the Seven Against Thebes were well known and are all reflected strongly in Roman mythology.

Etruscans: Rome also had a vibrant cultural exchange with the Etruscans to the north. This was a highly developed city-state-based culture that excelled in metalworking, architecture, town planning, and the arts. However, the Etruscans left little in the way of their own mythic record, and much of what does remain is mainly Greek mythology. The Etruscan writings that have come down to us are in the form of inscriptions, mainly short epitaphs and details of Etruscan ritual practice rather than any discernable mythology.

Etruscan elements are reflected strongly in Roman mythology in the stories of the last king of Rome, particularly the grandly named Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the proud), the rape of Lucretia, the invasion of Lars Porsena, and the tale of Horatius at the bridge.

Sabines: The Oscan-speaking Sabines who inhabited the Apennine Hills to the northeast of Rome may have also had a rich oral tradition that influenced Latin and Roman culture. Cicero reported that the Sabines were renowned for their deeply held religious views and vast amount of superstitious practices. The myth of the rape of the Sabine women directly connects Rome with their Sabine neighbors, and Sabine influence can be detected in Roman religious and burial customs. The myths surrounding the second king of Rome, Numa, and the myth of Titus Tatius and the treason of Tarpeia, which will be examined in this course, all reflect a strong Sabine influence.

Drama

Plays were one of the earliest forms of literature to contain evidence of mythological content in Roman culture. Drama became wildly popular in Republican Rome from the third century BCE onwards, as Rome developed a taste for all things Greek. Rome's first permanent theatre was not built until 55 BCE by Pompey, and so dramatic performances were staged in temporary structures as part of festival celebrations to entertain the Roman populace.

These plays were produced by wealthy young Romans who sought to ingratiate themselves with the Roman people as they climbed the ranks of the aristocracy. These were usually Aediles, a junior position beneath the Tribune of the People, their official function involving the maintenance of the Roman infrastructure rather like a local councilman. To get noticed and advance in public life, the Aediles financed dramatic performances and many of them contained either direct mythological themes or contained many mythological allusions.

Livius Andronicus: The earliest known Roman dramatist was Livius Andronicus, who seems to have come to Rome as a prisoner of war from the Greek city of Tarentum in southern Italy. Like most Roman drama, his plays are lost, but there is evidence that his first play staged in Rome in 240 BCE was a tragedy that told the story of the mythical Roman hero Lucius Junius Brutus, the legendary founder of the Roman Republic and ancestor of the Marcus Junius Brutus who led the conspiracy against Julius Caesar. We know the titles of just eight of Andronicus' plays, and they seem to be versions of works by Sophocles and Euripides. Livius Andronicus also produced a Latin version of *The Odyssey* known as *The Odyssia,* in which he altered many Greek gods to represent native Latin deities.

Plautus: We have twenty-one plays of Plautus, a comic dramatist from Umbria, the region between Latium and Etruria. He produced his work in Rome at the very beginning of the second century BCE. These highly physical farces were modeled primarily after the "New Comedy" of Athenian dramatists such as Menander, whose plays had first been performed in Athens in the fourth century and had spread across the Hellenistic world to the Greek cities of southern Italy.

Although most of the plays are domestic situation comedies with stock comic characters, the texts are full of mythological references and one play has survived that was even based on a popular Greek myth. This was the *Amphitruo,* a comic version of the myth of Amphitryon. Here Amphitryon's wife Alcmene is visited by Zeus in the guise of her husband. Thinking that her husband has returned victorious from war, she lays with the god and eventually gives birth to the semi-divine hero Herakles.

Terence: In the mid-second century, Terence, a comic dramatist who was originally a slave from North Africa, produced several plays for the Roman *ludi,* or festival days. Terence also translated and adapted earlier Greek plays, but developed a new sense of dramatic realism with the use of colloquial Latin and sophisticated rhetorical speech. Yet Terence kept the sense of the Greek world, although this was more subtle than in the works of Plautus. In the plays of both Plautus and Terence, we see the profound

influence of Greek comedy and cultural morés gradually being adapted for Roman audiences. The development of Roman drama at this period and its "translation" of Greek plays can offer us a useful cultural parallel as we seek to understand the development and use of Roman myth.

Histories

Herodotus: Another major influence from Greece was the idea of composing a written history. The very notion of "history" was a Greek concept beginning with the work of Herodotus in the mid-fifth century. His writings documented the events surrounding the Persian Wars fought between the Greeks and Persian Empire in the early fifth century BCE. Herodotus makes little distinction between factual history and mythology. In fact, he opens his work by explaining the cause of the actual Persian War by using mythological examples of an age-old animosity between east and west.

In book one of his *History,* Herodotus tells us that Phoenician traders visited Argos in Greece and carried off the king's daughter Io to Egypt. In return, some Greeks from Crete called in at the Phoenician port of Tyre and carried off Europa, the daughter of the king. Then the Greeks under Jason stole Medea from Colchis. When the king of Colchis demanded reparation, the Greeks replied that none was due, as they had not received due reparation for Io. Then came the abduction of Helen of Sparta by Paris of Troy and the great Trojan War, a conflict that Herodotus attributes to the origin of Persian aggression toward Greece.

Notice the Phoenicians of Tyre here. We will hear of them again when we examine Virgil's *Aeneid* and analyze the mythology of Dido, Queen of Carthage.

Thucydides: At the end of the fifth century, Thucydides rejects mythological accounts stating in book one of his *History of the Peloponnesian War* that "the aim of the poet is more to delight the ear than to be true. Their accounts cannot be trusted and many are not credible as they have achieved the status of myth over time." But Thucydides cannot completely disentangle myth from history. More often than not, his approach seeks to explain myths rather than completely discount them. Thucydides recognized the close bond that existed between mythology and history.

Greek Writers on Rome

There are several known Greek historians, most of them from Magna Graecia, who included accounts of Roman history and mythology in their works.

Antiochus of Syracuse (Fifth century BCE): Wrote a history of Sicily and Italy from the mythical origins to 424 BCE.

Hellanicus of Lesbos (Fifth century BCE): Wrote a work called *Troica* that continued the story after the Trojan War and told of Aeneas arriving in Italy. This had great influence on Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his *Roman Antiquities.*

Hieronymus of Cardia (Late fourth to early third century BCE): According to Dionysius, was the first historian to go into detail on the mythological origins of Rome.

Timaeus of Tauromenium (356–260 BCE): From Sicily, collected accounts of Roman history.

Roman Writers

Fabius Pictor (Late third century BCE): The earliest Roman historian whose works are known was the senator Fabius Pictor. He wrote a history of the Romans in Greek, placing the date of the foundation of Rome at 787 BCE.

Quintus Ennius (239–169 BCE): Composed a narrative poem *Annales* in Latin hexameters to create a Latin epic form based on Homer. It contains a history of Rome from Aeneas to his own lifetime. Originally 30,000 lines, only 600 have come down to us.

Cato the Censor (234–148 BCE): The first to write a history of Rome in Latin prose: *The Origins.* Around 150 fragments survive, mentioning the origins of the Roman people, the city, the kings, and the early Republic.

Varro (116–27 BCE): Wrote 490 books by the age of seventy-seven! We know fifty-five titles, but have only one complete work on agriculture called *De re Rustica.* His organizational methods provided the basis for many later Roman scholars.

Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE): His only surviving work is the *Natural History,* though he was known to have written some thirty-seven books. Pliny died in the great eruption of Vesuvius at Pompeii.

Livy (59 BCE–17 CE): A contemporary of the Emperor Augustus, he wrote a huge history of Rome, *The History of Rome,* which was published near the end of his life. It comprised 142 books. Only thirty-five remain, and the first ten books cover the origins of Rome to 293 BCE.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Late first century BCE): A Greek who lived in Rome, he wrote a work called *Roman Antiquities,* which was published in 7 CE. It discussed the origins of Rome and the history of the Romans to 264 BCE—twenty books in all, we have eleven to 443 BCE and some fragments from the rest.

Cicero (106–43 BCE): An orator and politician who commented on the development of the political systems of Rome in *On the State.* His outline of the history of Rome down to the mid-fifth century is the earliest complete continuous narrative we have.

Diodorus Siculus (Late first century BCE): A Greek who wrote a history of Rome, of which books eleven through twenty have survived, from 466–302 BCE.

Plutarch (46–120 CE): A Greek biographer writing in Rome who wrote *Parallel Lives,* including Romulus, Numa, Publicola, Coriolanus, Camillus, and Pyrrhus.

Poetry

Latin poetry often contained mythical allusions or dealt directly with mythic themes such as the works of Catullus (84–54 BCE) and Horace (65–8 BCE).

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What was one of the earliest forms of literature to contain evidence of mythological content?
2. Who was Herodotus?

Suggested Reading

Boardman, John, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray, eds. *The Oxford History of the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Other Books of Interest

Beacham, Richard C. *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Cornell, T.J. *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Feeney, Denis. *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts and Beliefs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Gabba, Emilio. *Dionysius and the History of Archaic Rome*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Mellor, Ronald, ed. *The Historians of Ancient Rome*. Second ed. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Segal, Erich. *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Wiseman, Timothy P. *Roman Drama and Roman History*. Exeter (UK): University of Exeter Press, 1998.

Lecture 3:
Greek Myths and the Romans:
Cacus, Hercules, and the Greeks in Italy

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read John Boardman's *The Greeks Overseas: The Early Colonies and Trade.*

The Greeks in Italy

In order to appreciate the Roman mythic tradition, it is essential to gain a full understanding of the huge influence Greek mythology, religion, and culture had on Rome.

Greek Influence on Rome

- The Greek colonies on Sicily and southern Italy to the south.
- Secondary cultural influence from Etruscans to the north.
- Punic Wars with Carthage and conflict with Greek city-states.
- Greek immigration of professional and intellectual class into Rome.

The Myth of Cacus

An old myth of early Rome, the myth of Cacus, acts as a cultural marker of the early and important influence of Greek mythology on the mythic traditions of Rome. The myth is told by both Livy in his *History of Rome* (1.7.3-15) and by Virgil in *The Aeneid* (8.190-279).

Hercules is the Latin name for Herakles, the great Greek hero and semi-divine son of Zeus. Hercules killed the three-bodied monster Geryon and drove his cattle down through Italy on his way back to Greece. The taking of the cattle of Geryon was one of the twelve labors inflicted upon him after he had killed his wife in a fit of madness.

Hercules drove the cattle across the Tiber and laid down to rest on a grassy plain at the foot of the Aventine Hill on the future site of the Roman Forum. He woke at dawn to find that a number of his herd was missing. He found their tracks, but was confused when he saw that they led away from a cave at the foot of the hill. The entrance to the cave was blocked with a huge rock that even ten oxen could not move.

During the night, the cattle had been dragged away backwards by a fire-breathing monster called Cacus. But Hercules heard the cattle lowing in the cave and smashed open the rock to find the huge frame of Cacus blocking his way. Hercules leapt on the monster and, after a bitter struggle in which Cacus called in vain to his comrades for help, Hercules killed him with a deadly blow from his club.

The local king, a man called Evander, a Greek refugee from the Peloponnesus, greeted Hercules. When Peloponnesus learned who Hercules was and of his divine father, he cried out, "All hail Hercules, son of Jupiter—my mother prophesied that you would join the gods and that here would be a shrine in your name that would grace the place that would be the most power-

ful country in the world. This shall be called the Ara Maxima." Hercules accepted his new shrine and presided over the first sacrifice.

Virgil further embellished the myth and tells how Hercules cleverly penetrated the cave and tore off a pinnacle of flint from the cave roof, from which he rained down arrows on Cacus. The fire-breathing giant spat huge billows of smoke and fire and finally Hercules was able to slay him.

The Meaning of the Myth

What does this myth reveal about the Romans' own knowledge of their distant past?

The versions of this myth in literature all come from the Augustan period. We seem to have no representations of Cacus in Roman art, although the myth inspired several Renaissance representations, including *Hercules and Cacus* by Baccio Bandinelli (1534), which stands in the Piazza Signora in Florence. Here a defiant Hercules, holding his powerful club, towers over a fallen Cacus, whom he holds by the hair.

The myth may be a memory of the place of early contact with Greek culture, the thriving port of the Tiber at the Forum Boarium.

- The myth locates Hercules at the Forum Boarium (old Roman cattle market) in Rome.
- A temple of Hercules dating from the late second and early first century BCE, located in the Forum Boarium, would seem to add credibility to a general knowledge of this myth prior to the Augustan period.
- The circular temple survives today. It became consecrated as a Christian church named St. Stephen of the Carriages.
- The area next to the Tiber and bordered by the Capitoline, Palatine, and Aventine Hills was an important commercial market, a port area as evidenced by Greek pottery from the eighth century BCE found there.
- Several cults with Greek and Phoenician connections have been found there, including the site of the cult of Hercules at the Ara Maxima (great altar).
- Hercules was a popular god with traveling merchants. His grand mythological travels across the known world seemed to reflect their own difficult journeys.
- The cult of Hercules in Rome may well have been one of the earliest foreign deities to have been incorporated by the Romans as far back as the eighth century BCE.

Other Important Etiological Markers Found in the Myth

- The fording of the Tiber connects Hercules with the shrine of Portunus, the deity of the port of the Tiber also located in this area and possibly associated with sixth-century BCE Greek seafaring cults.
- Hercules' rising at dawn invokes the cult of Mater Matuta, the goddess of the dawn who also had a shrine in this area.
- Archaeological remains from the archaic temple of Mater Matuta dating from the late sixth century BCE have unearthed a magnificent sculptural

group from the roof of the temple depicting Athena (or Minerva) and Hercules now on view in the Montemartini museum in Rome. Crafted from terra-cotta in a distinctly Etruscan style, the group depicts the traditional iconographic markers of Hercules, the strong male frame and lion skin tied around the shoulders. Unfortunately, the head of this Hercules has not been recovered.

Why Hercules?

Why was Hercules seemingly the first Greek mythic deity to find a place in Roman rites and practices? To understand this, it is necessary to take a brief look at the myth of Hercules as it is preserved in the Greek mythic tradition.

- Hercules is an important figure in Greek mythology. He encapsulates the idea of the hero—a strong warrior forced into the extremes of society who performs a series of quests in order to win his place in the community. In the case of Hercules, he will eventually become a hero god and ascend to Olympus.
- Hercules is the son of Zeus and the mortal Alcmene. Right from the start, Zeus's wife Hera sought to destroy the child by sending snakes to strangle him in his crib. Hercules possessed superhuman strength even as an infant and he strangled the snakes—a motif for defying death.
- Hercules was an incredibly popular theme in Greek art and drama. One myth tells of how he is driven mad by Hera and kills his wife and children in a terrible fit of madness. This tragic event was captured brilliantly by Euripides in his late-fifth-century play, *The Madness of Heracles.*
- To purge himself of this terrible crime, Hercules is ordered to serve his cousin Eurystheus as a slave in the Greek city of Tiryns near Mycenae. But Eurystheus fears his powerful relative and sets him twelve impossible labors.
- The labors pit Hercules against mythical beasts such as the Nemean lion, which has an impenetrable hide. Hercules wrestles and suffocates the lion, using his pelt as his famous lion skin. Hercules is often helped by Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and gradually travels further and further afield, even to the end of the earth in the pursuit of his quests.

Hercules the Great Traveler

- South: After traveling throughout the Peloponnesus to complete the first six labors, he heads to the far south to subdue the Cretan Bull.
- North: Then he travels to the far north to Thrace to face the man-eating horses of Diomedes.
- East: He heads east to claim the girdle of the queen of the Amazons.
- West: Then he travels to the far west to Spain to fetch the cattle of Geryon. The twin peaks of Gibraltar off the coast of Spain and Cuerta in north Africa are still called the "Pillars of Hercules."
- The end of the world: He goes to the end of the earth to see Atlas, who has the world on his shoulders, and recover the golden apples of the Hesperides.
- The Underworld: Then he travels into the very depths of the underworld to bring the fearsome guard dog Cerberus to heel.

Hercules in Rome

It is his journey to rustle the cattle of Geryon that brings Hercules to Rome. The Greek versions do not place him in Rome but have him traversing north Africa and shooting arrows at the sun for bearing down hard on him. The sun, taking a liking to this impudent mortal, lends Hercules his cup, which he uses to skim over the ocean, and Hercules heads to the region of Erythea (near Cadiz in Spain), where the three-bodied monster Geryon grazes his cattle. Hercules kills Geryon and drives his cattle through the south of Spain (Andulcia and Valencia), along the coast of the south of France, and down through Italy and Sicily.

One side myth tells of a calf that Hercules chased across the Italian peninsula. Some Roman commentators, including Varro, thought that the term "Italy" was derived from the Latin *vitulus*—which means calf.

Why does the mythic tradition have Hercules drive his herd via the Mediterranean coasts of Spain, France, and then down through Italy and Sicily before heading back up to the north of Greece? This was Hercules' tenth labor and last "earth-bound" journey. Next, he would head to the end of the world and down to Hades. Perhaps the myth articulates something historical that happened in the Greek world at the end of the Dark Ages in the eighth century BCE, something that would have a vitally important impact on the fledgling community that would eventually become Rome.

The Greek Colonization of Italy

After the collapse of Mycenean palace culture around 1200 to 1000 BCE, articulated in mythology by the events of the Trojan War cycle, the Greek world entered the Dark Ages. Existing political systems broke down and Greek communities again became isolated and mainly agrarian communities.

Through contact with Anatolia and the Near East, a rise in seafaring and trade networks, and the new prosperity that resulted, former tribal chiefdoms developed into flourishing city-states trading with a network of foreign communities throughout the Mediterranean basin.

During this period, vivid oral tradition kept alive the memory of a mythic past, as storytelling bards crossed the Greek world telling their tales of gods and heroes.

Contact with the Phoenicians of Tyre (Lebanon) brought a new alphabet amalgamated with the old scriptural forms of Linear A and B. Around 750 BCE, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were written down.

This period of growth after years of social stagnation is known in artistic circles as the Orientalizing Period. This is a useful term, as Greece was heavily influenced by the arts and crafts of the East. Painted pottery, sculpture, perfume, wine, olive oil, wood, pitch, fabrics, salt and spices, and dyes and metals, amongst a myriad of other consumer goods, were all being moved in vast quantities across the seas.

One important result of all this trading activity and newfound social stability was a massive and sudden population boom. This was a crisis in the Greek world as various city-states attempted to solve the problem.

- The Spartans conquered their neighbors in Messenia, reducing them to helots, tithe slaves forced to harvest their own lands for the benefit of their Spartan overlords.
- Athens attempted to solve its population situation by instituting internal land and social reform.
- Other Greek cities looked to the founding of colonies abroad to not only protect newfound and lucrative trade routes but also provide new homes for their burgeoning populations.

The First Colonies

The first colony to be established in the Adriatic Sea between Greece and Italy was Corcyra (Corfu) by the city of Eretria in Euboea, a region that lies off the east coast of Attica.

Corcyra may have been a staging post for a further expansion west to the island of Pithecusae (modern Ischia) off the west coast of Italy at the mouth of the Bay of Naples.

This emporion, or trading station, developed into a full-fledged *polis* with a population in the thousands before the community moved to the mainland and founded the Greek city of Cumae ten miles to the northwest of modern-day Naples, around 725 BCE.

Cumae became one of the most influential Greek cities in Italy, dominating the Campanian coast until 474 BCE, when the city was defeated by an Etruscan and Syracusian alliance. Cumae fell under Roman influence in 338 when the citizens were given Roman citizenship.

In Roman mythology, Cumae played an important role as the home of the Cumaean Sibyl and the cult of Apollo, both linked strongly to the powers of prophecy and divination. It is the Sibyl of Cumae beneath the temple of Apollo that led Aeneas into the underworld and revealed the future of Rome.

Other important Greek colonies in Sicily and southern Italy included

- The Sicilian city of Syracuse, founded by the Corinthians.
- Tarentum in southern Italy, the only colony founded by Sparta.
- Gela, founded by Rhodians and Cretans.
- The Achaean colonies of Sybaris, Croton, Metapontum, and Paestum.

There's a direct link with the myth of Hercules and Geryon and the new Greek colonies founded in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE in Italy.

- Hercules trudges through the hot sun of North Africa, where the Therans established a colony at Cyrene in 630 BCE.
- He stole the cattle from Geryon and drove them through Spain, where the Phocaeans had a trading colony aptly named Emporion.
- As he traveled through the south of France, he would have passed the sites of the Phocaean cities of Massalia (Marseilles) and Nicaea (Nice).
- Even his earlier expedition to the realm of the Amazons reflects the colonization by Miletus of the Turkish coast, the Bosphorus, the Danube, and the Black Sea coast.

With them, the Greeks brought their religion, customs, language, literature, mythology, tales of the Trojan War recorded by Homer and the tragic dramatists, the deeds of their Olympian gods, the legends of heroes such as Cadmus, Oedipus, Jason, Perseus, and, of course, Hercules.

Other Notable Aspects of the Cacus Myth

- The name Cacus may be derived from the Greek *kakos,* meaning “bad” or “evil.”
- Many of the motifs in the Cacus myth resemble the myth of Polyphemus the Cyclops found in the epic tradition of Odysseus, another great mythological traveler.
- The cattle rustling committed by Hercules and Cacus is similar to the outlaw activities of Romulus and Remus, who also rustle cattle.
- Cacus is a son of Vulcan, and the Romans often associated themselves with the god of the forge and the goddess of the hearth fire Vesta. Fire plays an important part in many early Roman myths, perhaps an allusion to the metalworking foundries of Etruria to the north or an identification with a powerful god of technology. The Roman Vulcan is a far stronger god than his Greek namesake, the lame and rather put-upon Hephaestus.
- The smoky end of Cacus in Virgil may be a poetic reference to the volcanic region of Mount Alba to the south of Rome and a jibe at the Sabines who lived in that area and were mythological and historical rivals to the Romans.
- Some comparative religion scholars have seen a common motif between the Cacus myth and Indo-European Vedic mythology. Here Cacus is a fiery comet disrupting the elements and Hercules is the clouds drifting across the earth.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What was the myth of Cacus?
2. What was the Orientalizing Period?

Suggested Reading

Boardman, John. *The Greeks Overseas: Early Colonies and Trade*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1999.

Other Books of Interest

Bremmer, J.N., and Hosfall N.M. "Roman Myth and Mythography." London: *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*. Supplement 52, 1987.

Grant, Michael. *Roman Myths*. Chapter 3. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

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Padilla, Mark W. *The Myths of Herakles in Ancient Greece*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998.

Ridgway, David. *The First Western Greeks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Lecture 4:
Arcadian Fantasies:
The Fathers of the Founders

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read T.J. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (chapter 2: "The Pre Roman Background").

The Mythical Forefathers of Rome

Because the Roman mythic tradition developed at a moment when the written word was also in use and was becoming the primary transmitter of mythic stories, many distinct versions have come down to us. As these works were often commissioned by or performed to win the favor of a particular wealthy patron or political faction, Roman myth can often seem to have been manipulated. However, this offers the opportunity to study a mythic tradition as it develops, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the various foundation myths of ancient Rome.

Within the corpus of myths that have survived, we see an emphasis on accentuating a close connection with Greece in some stories, a close connection with Troy in others. In some myths, the ancestors of certain high-powered Roman families are featured at the expense of a rival. This process culminates in Virgil's great epic work *The Aeneid,* written to glorify the new age of Augustus.

Evander

Evander was known to the Greeks as a minor deity or the object of a hero cult from the Peloponnesian region called Arcadia. His literary champion was the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who lived in Augustan Rome and wrote an enormous twenty-book history of Rome called *Roman Antiquities.* Dionysius was determined to emphasize the historical connection between Greece and Rome, and the distant mythological figure of Evander served his purpose well.

Evander also has a mythological link with another of Rome's great founder figures, Aeneas, as they were related through their shared ancestor the Titan Atlas and the founding father of the Trojans, Dardanus. Roman myth also placed the namesake of the Dardanelles, the region of Troy, in Italy, and placed some pride in believing that the Trojans were originally Italian.

Arcadia

According to Dionysius, the first Greeks to arrive in Italy were also from Arcadia and settled there in the early eighteenth century BCE. Some settled in Apulia, while others moved north to Umbria and Sabine territory and became known as Aborigines. Dionysius may well be adapting this myth to create a Greek-centric spin. As in other sources, the Aborigines is simply the name for the indigenous Italian people who lived in the region.

The Pelasgians are mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* as coming from Thrace to the north of Greece. Other Greek sources, such as the historian Herodotus,

think them an ancient people who once populated the Aegean. The Athenians would describe themselves as "Pelasgian," as they believed that Athenians were born of the soil of Attica and were "original" Greeks. Pelasgus is named in Greek myth as a mythic king of the Pelasgians, who were said to inhabit Arcadia.

Pelasgus migrated from Arcadia and settled in Thessally in northern Greece, perhaps in response to an invasion of Arcadia—something of this seems to have been encapsulated in the myth of the Danaïds.

This mythic and cultural memory of Arcadia, being a well-spring of pre-Hellenic Greek culture, may have a basis in history. Some scholars believe that invasions by the Sea Peoples from the south and Dorians from the north destroyed the Mycenaean palace culture. The mountainous country of Arcadia, deep inland, held on to its pre-Dorian cultural features. Even during the classical period Arcadia resisted the development of the city-state until the founding of Megalopolis in 370 BCE.

It seems that the colonies and new cities of central Italy claimed descent from the Arcadian Pelasgians to associate themselves with ancient Greek bloodlines. It is probably in this context that the myth comes to us via Dionysius, who also has them coming from Thessaly.

According to Dionysius, the Aborigines and Pelasgians united, as two Greek peoples might, against a tribe called the Sicels, the inhabitants of western central Italy, and drove them out to an island at the toe of Italy that became named for them—Sicily. The Pelasgians were eventually overrun by the Etruscans, while the Aborigines were credited with being the first to settle in the area that would later become Rome.

It is at this point in Dionysius's quasi-mythic history that Evander arrives. Interestingly enough, he too is a refugee from Arcadia—another Greek settling in central Italy. It is worth considering the importance of Arcadia on Roman mythology. This region of the central Peloponnese played a vital imaginative role in the shaping of Roman identity and the classical notion of the perfect pastoral landscape encapsulated by Virgil in his *Eclogues.* The term "Arcadian" is still in use today to describe an ideal mythic place perhaps best encapsulated in the seventeenth-century paintings of Claude Lorraine and Poussin.

On the Arcadian Mt. Lycaeon was an altar to Zeus. Lycaeus was sacred land and it was strictly forbidden to enter there. Ancient authors such as Plato and Pausanius report a grisly tradition of human sacrifice and that participants in the rites ate human flesh and were turned into wolves. The cult was said to have been instituted by Lycaon, the king of Arcadia and the son of Pelasgus, the very same father of the Pelasgians, the original Greek settlers in Italy. It seems that Lycaon offered Zeus the flesh of a newly sacrificed child to test his divinity, and Zeus punished him by changing him to a wolf (the Greek word for wolf is "lykos").

Werewolves

The myth of Lycaon and his human sacrifice is known as lycanthropy, the technical name for the transformation of a human into a werewolf and an actual medical diagnosis in the ancient world—treated by bloodletting. There was

a Greek mythic tradition of a band of athletes who lived as wolves for ten years and regained their human form only if they did not eat human flesh. They would then go on to win all athletic contests. Anthropologists and classical scholars have seen a parallel between this mythic tradition and the cultural institution of the *ephebe,* or the Spartan Krypteia, where young warriors were made social outcasts for a period of their military training in order to develop hunting and survival skills before being reincorporated into society and entering manhood.

Dionysius tells us in his history of early Rome that Evander was welcomed by king Faunus and allowed to settle on the Roman Palatine Hill after Evander had received a prophecy from his mother, a nymph known to the Greeks as Themis and to the Romans as Carmenta—the singer of songs (prophecies). She said that on the site of the Palatine Hill would grow the greatest city the world had ever seen. Some myths tell us that the Palatine Hill was named after a city called Pallenteum in Arcadia, others that it was named for Pallas, the grandson of Evander who had died there.

As the Arcadians built their new city, they first dedicated a temple to Lycaean Pan (Pan of the Wolves). Pan is the Greek equivalent of Faunus, the god of the wild. Both Pan and the Faun are depicted in the same fashion, with hoofed feet, shaggy legs, tails, naked torsos, and horned heads. This temple was said to have been built near a cave under the hill covered by a thick wood, with a deep spring rising from inside. This was the Roman Lupercal—*lupa* is Latin for wolf. Dionysius goes one step further and announces that we should call it the Lycaon, the same as the shrine to human sacrifice in Arcadia.

The Lupercal is an incredibly important site in Roman history and cultural consciousness. As we will learn in a later lecture, it was the site of the suckling of Romulus and Remus by the she-wolf. Is it the most famous of all Roman myths based on a Greek cult of human sacrifice? The connections certainly cannot be ignored.

It was at the Lupercal in 44 BCE that Mark Antony offered a royal crown to Julius Caesar, who refused it three times.

Augustus Caesar restored the Lupercal and added a statue of Drusus, his beloved stepson, who died in 9 BCE.

The Lupercalia

Ovid compiled an account of the various Roman festivals called *The Fasti*. In it, he documents an important Roman festival that centered around the Lupercal every year on February fifteenth. A goat and a dog were sacrificed and two boys were smeared in their blood by a knife in what seems to have been a mock human sacrifice. Then two groups of young men called the Luperci, naked except for goat skins, ran against each other in opposite directions around the Palatine. As they ran, they struck female bystanders with strips of animal hide, which was supposed to bring fertility. This festival seems to have been a purification and fertility rite, and yet many of its features mirror the Arcadian Lycaean myth. The Lupercalia survived until 494 CE, when the Christian bishop of Rome banned participation, then changed it into the feast of the Purification of the Virgin.

Latinus

According to Virgil, Latinus was the mythological king of the Aborigines, son of Faunus and father of the Latin peoples at the time of Aeneas's arrival in Italy. Virgil has him ruling in the city of Laurentum, near the mouth of the Tiber, and welcoming Aeneas in book seven of his *Aeneid.*

Latinus is mentioned in an early Greek text. Hesiod's *Theogony* is the earliest textual account of the Greek gods that has come down to us, a written record of an epic song in praise of Olympus. Hesiod sung of the origins of the universe, the genealogy of the gods, the invention of woman, and the five ages of man. He named Latinus and his brother Agrius as rulers of the "famous Tyrrhenians in the midst of holy island." In another tantalizing line, Hesiod states that Latinus is the son of Odysseus and Circe. Odysseus too was sometimes claimed as a founding father by many Greek cities in Italy. Odysseus, like Herakles, was an obvious choice as a great mythical traveler who had once visited the western lands.

In uniting his Aborigines with the newly arrived Trojans, he gave his name to the new people, the Latins. Another tradition has Latinus married to a Trojan woman who arrived with Aeneas called Rhome—the Greek term for strength. Plutarch tells us of an unnamed account that has the Pelasgians founding the city and naming it Rhome after their military strength.

In the *Aeneid,* Latinus is a rather ineffective old man who gives his daughter in marriage to Aeneas and in so doing breaks a treaty and incurs the warlike wrath of the Rutulian king Turnus, plunging central Italy into bitter war.

The Roman mythic tradition seemed intent on establishing a close connection between Rome and Arcadia. We do not know if the myths developed as etiological explanations of existing rituals or if the mythic tradition contains actual historical memory, or perhaps a little of both. Were these early myths invented to fulfill a need in the collective memory of the Roman people, to forge a new identity that linked their rapidly developing city with the rich and historic culture of Greece while at the same time distancing themselves from the real Greeks they eventually came to conquer? Perhaps the answer was to try to encapsulate this in one mythic father figure, a man of Greek culture, but not a Greek, in fact, one descended from an Italian—Virgil's great epic hero, the Trojan refugee Aeneas.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. Who was Evander's literary champion?
2. What is lycanthropy? How was it treated in the ancient world?

Suggested Reading

Cornell, T.J. *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Other Books of Interest

Boyle, Anthony James. *Ovid Fasti*. Trans. Roger Dillard Woodard. London: Penguin, 2000.

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Malkin, Irad. *The Returns of Odysseus: Colonization and Ethnicity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Scullard, H.H. *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Lecture 5:
Trojan Ancestors:
The Myth of Aeneas

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Homer's *Iliad,* translated by Stanley Lombardo (books 1 through 5 and book 20).

Aeneas is a notable hero in Greek mythology. He is a member of the younger strain of the Trojan royal family and is the son of the mortal Trojan Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite.

Aeneas appears several times in Homer's *Iliad.* In book five, he faces the ferocious Greek warrior Diomedes. After entering the battle on his war chariot, Aeneas's companion Pandarus is killed. Aeneas is determined to protect his friend's body and not let the Greek strip his armor.

> *"Aeneas vaulted down with his shield and spear,*
> *Afraid that the Greeks might drag the body away.*
> *He straddled it like a lion sure of its strength,*
> *Spear straight out, crouched behind his shield's disk,*
> *Only too glad to kill whoever stood up to him,*
> *His mouth open in a battle howl."*
>
> Homer, *Iliad* 5

Homer then has Diomedes pick up a huge rock that even two men could barely lift and throw it at Aeneas. It smashes his hip and "The hero / sank to his knees, clenching the dirt with one hand, / while midnight settled upon both his eyes."

But his mother, Aphrodite, intervenes, wraps him in her heavenly robes, and pulls him out of the battle and harm's way. Diomedes, in a famous episode, is so enraged that he pursues the goddess on the battlefield, even going so far as to wound her so that divine ichor, the fluid than runs through immortal veins, flows. In great pain, Aphrodite drops Aeneas and Apollo scoops him up, shrouding him in an indigo cloud. Diomedes is persistent and as Aphrodite is spirited away to Olympus in the chariot of Ares, the Greek tries three times to kill Aeneas. Aeneas is spirited to heaven and healed by Leto and Artemis.

In book twenty, Aeneas is at risk again, this time from the Greek's best warrior, Achilles. Before they fight, Aeneas boasts of his lineage, all the way back to Dardanus, the mythical founder of the Trojan people, and his divine mother. But Achilles gets the better of him and is about to strike a death blow when Poseidon, the god of the sea, intervenes. Poseidon remarks on Aeneas's piety to the gods, a feature that later Roman myth will accentuate, and he remarks on a famous prophecy:

"Zeus will be angry if Achilles kills him,
For it is destined that Aeneas escape
And the line of Dardanus not be destroyed
And disappear without seed – Dardanus
Whom Zeus loved more than any of the sons
Born from the union with mortal women.
The son of Cronos has come to hate Priam's line,
And now Aeneas will rule the Trojans with might,
And the sons born to his sons in the future."

Homer, *Iliad* 20

The myth of Aeneas that connects him to Rome is the tradition that Aeneas somehow escaped the sack of Troy and went on to found a new city. Within the epic cycle of the Trojan War, there is a story found in the lost *Ilia Persis* that Aeneas and his family actually left Troy after hearing the doom-laden prophecies of Laocoon, the ill-fated Trojan seer who was killed by a sea serpent as he tried to warn the Trojans not to accept the Greek gift of the wooden horse.

But the most famous myth of Aeneas circulating in the Greek world of the Archaic and Classical period was the flight of Aeneas from the burning citadel of Troy, carting his aged father Anchises on his back. The image of the Trojan hero rescuing his father (and in some versions, his son Ascanius too) was a popular motif in Greek art. We find this story on Greek painted pottery dating from the sixth century BCE, including several finds in Etruria. The iconography of familial piety to the male blood line was highly valued on Greek patriarchal society, and found its way into Greek literature of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

The notion that Aeneas founded a new city was also very important to the Greeks. There were as many as sixteen cities actually named after Aeneas dotted throughout the Greek world as far away as Thrace, Chalcidice, Epirus, and Sicily, as well as accounts of him visiting sacred shrines in Delos and Crete. It is not hard to imagine that each and every one of these cities would have developed a mythic tradition based around the Trojan hero and would have claimed to have been founded by him.

The tradition that Aeneas came to Italy seems to have been circulating during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, although the oral tradition may be much older. A fifth century BCE mythographer called Hellenicus of Lesbos includes what seems to be the earliest textual reference we have to a myth of Aeneas connected to the founding of Rome.

Hellenicus writes that Aeneas arrived in Italy from the land of the Molossians in northern Greece. He also hints that Odysseus may have accompanied him or came after him. This connection with Odysseus, another great mythical wanderer, can be seen in book three of Virgil's *Aeneid,* as the Trojan hero visits many of the same sites as Odysseus and even encounters one of his crew. Aeneas was forced to settle in Rome after a Trojan woman, tired of endless voyaging, burned their ships. Her name was Rhome.

Lavinium

By the third century BCE, the myth of Aeneas as having either founded or shaped the founding of Rome was well established amongst the central Italian peoples. An important shrine to Aeneas has been found at Lavinium (modern Pratica di Mare), the site where Aeneas was said to have first landed and an important town of the Latin League from around the sixth century BCE.

Lavinium remained an important cult site to the Romans long into the imperial period, for it was at Lavinium where the sacred Penates were said to reside. These were mythical spirits connected with the well being of the house and home. Pious Aeneas was often depicted carrying them from the burning city of Troy along with his father and son.

Why Aeneas?

It is clear that even before Virgil's great epic poem *The Aeneid,* composed in the Augustan period, the myth of Aeneas was circulating as a powerful foundation motif. However, Roman myth is complicated, and several figures vie for the status of founder of Rome: Faunus, Evander, Latinus, and Romulus.

Why did Virgil light upon Aeneas, and why did his myth seem to become prominent in the third century BCE? Prior to this time, he appears to have been one Italian founding father among many, including, it seems, Hercules and Odysseus.

Pyrrhus

Perhaps history can offer some clues as to how the myth of Aeneas could have been manipulated. By the third century BCE, the city-state of Rome was developing into a major center of trade, crafts, culture, and military power. Absorbing the varied cultural influences of the Sabines, the other Latin cities, the Greek colonies, Phoenician traders, and Etruscan city-states, the Romans found themselves almost constantly at war in an Italy where several rival communities were competing for supremacy. After battling the Etruscans, Samnites, Gauls, and Umbrians, the Romans started to assert themselves over the Greek colonies to the south.

In 280 BCE, the Greek city of Tarrentum appealed to a Greek ally to intervene and come to their aid. King Pyrrhus of Epirus joined the fray, sensing an opportunity to expand his imperial possessions. Pyrrhus cast his incursion as a new Trojan War—he believed he was descended from Achilles and was named for the son of Achilles, Neoptolemus, who was also called Pyrrhus and therefore was the natural leader of the combined Greek forces against the new Troy—Rome. After all, Rome had been founded by Aeneas.

Pyrrhus left Epirus in the Molossian territories of northern Greece and landed in southern Italy with 25,000 troops, 3,000 cavalry, and twenty war elephants. This force was modeled on the Macedonian army of Alexander the Great that had swept across Asia Minor all the way to India forty-five years before. The Romans marched south to meet them, also with a force of 25,000 men, but they had never before met the Macedonian Phalanx, a square of heavily armored and highly maneuverable infantrymen locked together by their large round shields formed in up to five rows with their deadly long spears.

At Heraclea (an area named for Hercules), the two armies met and the Romans were unable to break the Macedonian phalanx. Although Pyrrhus technically won the field that day, the sheer tenacity and military prowess of the Romans caused him over 7,000 casualties. The following year an even larger battle ended in the same result, and a frustrated Pyrrhus decided to campaign in the strategic island of Sicily instead, where he successfully drove out the Carthaginians.

During the two years Pyrrhus was fighting in Sicily, the Romans had managed to defeat the Samnites and Lucanians. When Pyrrhus returned to take on the Romans again, they split their forces under their two consuls and Pyrrhus was frustrated yet again. After losing two thirds of his army, Pyrrhus returned to Epirus. He had never lost a battle, but he had lost the war, and the term “Pyrrhic victory” was born.

The Pyrrhic war brought Rome into direct conflict with Greek forces, not only from the colonies in the south but also from the Greek mainland. The unconquerable Macedonian Phalanx had been thwarted and Rome now was the dominant military power in the whole Italian Peninsula. In 264 BCE, Roman forces crossed the straits of Messina in Sicily, and the long, bitter conflict against the Carthaginians began, a war that also was reflected in the Aeneas myth as the Trojan hero encounters another mythical founder, Dido, the queen of Carthage.

As the Romans became more and more embroiled in the Greek world, so the myth of Aeneas grew to become important political currency.

When the Romans invaded Sicily, the Greek city of Segesta immediately went over to them, claiming to be of Trojan descent and ancestors of Aeneas. The Romans seemed impressed and granted Segesta the status of a protected and free city.

In 237 BCE, the Acarnanians from western Greece appealed to the Romans for help against their neighbors, citing the case that they were not named in the Greek mythic tradition of having waged war against Troy.

There is also an account, which may or may not be genuine, that the Romans put pressure on the Seleucid monarch of the near-eastern territory that controlled the Troad (the area around Troy) to free the inhabitants of the area of taxation.

The mythical connection of Aeneas with Sicily was further reinforced during the second Punic War. Sicily had become Rome’s first overseas possession, and in 217, the Romans recognized the cult of Aphrodite and Aeneas on Mount Eryx, establishing their own Temple of Venus Erycina in Rome. Virgil locates book five of his *Aeneid* in Sicily and has Anchises buried there. To highlight the connection with Eryx, Virgil has Aeneas found the temple to his mother Venus there, and settled those Trojans who no longer wished to journey on with him in a new Trojan city called Acesta, which was to become Segesta the Sicilian city that ceded to the Romans in 264 BCE. Archaeology points to an older Phoenician shrine to the goddess Astarte, who later became associated with Aphrodite and Venus.

In 196 BCE, the important Pan Hellenic shrine to Apollo at Delphi, the place the Greeks regarded as the center of the earth, acknowledged the Romans' origins, calling them Aeneadae—the family of Aeneas.

Scholars have found many political connections between Aeneas, the Trojans, and the Romans, but it was Julius Caesar and his adopted son Octavian, who would become Augustus, who put the myth to its most effective use, that of establishing a new imperial dynasty in Rome that seemed destined to rule the known world.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What prophecy was associated with Aeneas's escape from Achilles?
2. What is the origin of the term "Pyrrhic victory"?

Suggested Reading

Homer. *Iliad*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Other Books of Interest

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Scullard, H.H. *A History of the Roman World 753-146 BC*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Lecture 6
Romulus and Remus

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read T.J. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (chapter 3: "The Origins of Rome").

The Myth of Romulusand Remus

Numitor was the king of the Latin city of Alba Longa, but his younger brother Amulius staged a coup and overthrew him, forcing him into exile.

In order to halt his brother's royal line, Amulius ordered Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, to become a Vestal Virgin and locked her away. But she was taken by Mars, the god of war, and bore twin sons, Romulus and Remus.

When Amulius discovered this he ordered Romulus and Remus be thrown to their deaths in the River Tiber, but the Tiber flooded and carried the twins to the banks of the future site of Rome, where they washed up by a fig tree near a cave.

The boys were found by a she-wolf, who dragged them to the cave for shelter and suckled them, saving their lives.

A huntsman called Faustulus found the babies, and he and his wife Acca Larentia raised the children as if theywere their own.

Romulus and Remus grew up and became shepherds and huntsmen, leading a band of young men who rustled cattle and stole goods from those they considered thieves.

The boys were celebrating the old Lupercalia festival in honor of Lycean Pan when a band of brigands set a trap to capture them. Romulus fought them off, but Remus was captured and brought before Numitor, who had become the head man of the region in his exile.

When Faustulus heard this, he confessed to Romulus that he suspected the twins were the lost sons of Numitor. Romulus told Numitor, who had begun to suspect as much, and together they overthrew Amulius and restored Numitor to the throne of Alba Longa.

Romulus and Remus decided to found a new city where the she-wolf had discovered them. But the brothers quarreled, and so Romulus settled the Palatine Hill and Remus the Aventine.

According to one myth, each twin received a sign, six vultures, but then Romulus saw twelve. A fight ensued and Romulus was killed.

The other version has it that Remus mocked the building of Romulus's walls and jumped over the foundation trench, whereupon he was struck and killed either by Romulus himself or one of his men, called Celer.

The Myth Unravelled: Alba Longa

The myth begins in the Latin city of Alba Longa, near modern Castel Gandolfo, twenty miles south of Rome.

According to ancient Roman historians, the traditional foundation date of Alba was 1152 BCE. Archaeological remains have been found dating back as far as the tenth century BCE, and there is strong evidence of early habitation in a cluster of small settlements on the Alban Mount.

Alba Longa grew into one of the strongest cities in Latium and was the leader of a league of Latin towns up to the eighth century BCE. The city seems to have lost primacy to Rome sometime in the mid seventh century BCE, and several noble Roman families were said to have emigrated to Rome during this period, including the *Iulii*—the family of Julius Caesar and Augustus. This may have contributed greatly in securing Alba Longa as an important place in Roman mythology.

Alba Longa is connected with the foundation of Rome in several different Roman mythological sources, and it constantly vies for mythological supremacy with the coastal Latin city of Lavinium, the city where Aeneas landed and united with the Aborigines under Latinus to form the Latin people. The archaeological evidence, however, points to the fact that Rome, Lavinium, and Alba seem to have developed at similar rates up until the mid seventh century BCE and that there is no evidence that Rome is a younger city.

The foundation chronology of Lavinium–Alba Longa–Rome came about as Roman historians, poets, and mythographers tried to reconcile the various myths in circulation about Rome's foundation and the origins of the Latin peoples. The Trojan War was supposed to have happened around 1200 BCE, and Rome to have been founded around 750 BCE, so a mythological chronology needed to be maintained. Aeneas founded Lavinium three years after arriving in Italy. His son Ascanius founded Alba Longa thirty years later. The intervening years were filled with the Alban Kings down to Numitor and his sons Romulus and Remus, who eventually founded Rome.

The Romans knew Alba was an important religious site, even though the city had declined in importance. The annual festival of the Latin people continued to be held on the Alban Mountain at the sanctuary of Jupiter Latiars, who was identified with the mythical Latinus.

Lavinium also housed an important shrine to Venus, a hero cult of Aeneas, and was said to have been the home of the sacred Roman gods of the household the Penates, which Aeneas brought from Troy. When Alba claimed to have inherited the Penates, a myth circulated that they magically returned to Lavinium like divine homing pigeons. Clearly, the two Latin cities vied for mythological supremacy as the foundation site of the Latins.

There is also an old Latin myth that is reported by several ancient writers and is also found in book eight of *The Aeneid.* The River Tiber tells Aeneas that he will be led to the site of his new home by a white sow who will lay down and give birth to thirty young. The myth and the prophecy it contained were variously interpreted by the ancient writers.

- The thirty piglets were said to represent the thirty peoples or cities of ancient Latium.
- Alba Longa would be founded thirty years after Lavinium.
- The white sow represented Alba Longa, as the word "Alba" means white.

The wild boar, or female sow, is a strong motif in Indo-European imagery. Among the Celtic peoples, the boar was a symbol of warlike power, and there is evidence on coins and sculpture that it was also an important image to the Latins. The Roman antiquarian Varro reported in the first century BCE that this sacred sow could still be seen in Lavinium preserved in brine.

The Alban king list as recorded by Livy includes the following:

- Ascanius, the son of Aeneas.
- Silvius, which means born in the woods.
- Tiberinus, who drowned crossing the river Albula, which then became known as the Tiber.
- Aventius, who was buried on the site of Rome and gave his name to the Aventine Hill.

Rhea Silvia

The mother of Romulus and Remus, Rhea Silvia is connected via her name Rhea to the great mother goddess Cybele, known to the Romans as Magna Mater. The cult of Cybele was officially imported into Rome in 205 BCE from Asia Minor. She was a goddess of fertility and abundance and a mistress of the wild. She was often depicted with lions, indicating both her Anatolian heritage and her connection with nature. She was associated with Demeter in Greece. In the Republican period, worship of Cybele was confined to her priests. By the first century, her cult was opened, made a legal religion in Rome, and attracted many followers who believed in the promise of an afterlife through renewal or reincarnation. Rhea is another term for the Great Mother and is attached to the mother of Romulus and Remus to further validate their divine status.

Mars

Mars was the most important Latin god after Jupiter. The month of March was named for him, and he became equated with the Greek god of war, Ares. Mars also has cult associations with agriculture, particularly as the god of spring, which is why most of his rituals occurred in March and April. Mars became associated with the Sabine god of war, Quirinius, who was identified with Romulus after his death. The animals associated with Mars are the wolf and the woodpecker. In one version of the Romulus and Remus myth, a woodpecker called Picus also assisted the abandoned twins.

Vesta

Rhea Silvia is ordered to serve the Roman goddess Vesta. She was the goddess of the hearth and was associated with the Greek goddess Hestia. Her cult signified the eternal life of the city of Rome with her ever-burning hearth fire. A shrine to Vesta was known in Republican Rome and resembled a simple house. This represented the hearth fire that burned in every Roman home and shows how Roman civic religion often appropriated private rites.

Inside the shrine of Vesta were several sacred objects, including the Palladiuim—a highly sacred wooden statue of Athena that was said to have been brought to Lavinium by Aeneas from Troy. Its presence in any city was

said to offer protection and Troy's fall was sealed by the theft of the Palladium by Diomedes and Odysseus. The inner sanctum of the shrine was one of the most holy places in Rome, and only the Chief Vestal was allowed to enter or look on the sacred objects held there. These included the fascinum, an erect phallus that was said to avert evil.

In *The Fasti,* Ovid tells a story of how the Temple of Vesta was burning and a Roman priest called Metellus ran in and saved the Palladium, knowing he would be committing sacrilege in doing so. Other versions say that he was made a hero of the Roman state but was ordered to be blinded for having gazed on the sacred objects.

The Vestal Virgins were noble Roman women who were selected to serve the temple as unmarried virgins for thirty years. As they were trusted with this great honor, many wealthy Romans entrusted their wills to be protected by the Vestals, who were said to have been beyond reproach.

The Fascinum

The biographer Plutarch, writing in the late first and early second centuries, documented another version of the myth of the birth of the twins that relates to the fascinum. He tells how the King of Alba beheld the strange sight of an erect penis that rose from his hearth fire and stayed there for several days. He sought advice from the gods via an oracle, which informed him that a virgin should give herself to the phallus and the offspring produced would become a very great man. The king, named Tarchetius in this version, ordered his daughter to mate with the phallus, but she balked at this and sent her servant to do it instead. Tarchetius discovered the truth and imprisoned them both. He was held back from killing them by a dream sent by Vesta, and then Romulus and Remus were born. They were abandoned in the Tiber, suckled by a she-wolf, saved by a herdsman, and grew up to kill Tarchetius.

This myth, which may be of Etruscan origin, is also reflected in a myth of the birth of one of the later kings of Rome, Servius Tullius, and has a connection to older Indo-European mythic motifs, where fire is equated with male virility and the divine spark of life.

Romulus and Remus are therefore equated with the Roman god of war, Mars, and the Great Mother. In both mythic traditions, they are strongly connected with Vesta, the symbol of eternal Rome.

The Long-Lost King

This is a common motif in Indo-European folklore and can be found in many parallel myths: Moses of the Israelites, Cyrus of Persia, Paris of Troy, Perseus, Oedipus, and Aegisthus in Greek myth, and the story of the birth of Christ.

1. A child is conceived in an irregular way, in secret, via a miracle or the work of a god.
2. The child is ordered killed by an evil monarch who has been warned of overthrow by a prophecy.
3. The child is not killed, but abandoned, usually in the wild or in a river or sea.

4. The child is rescued by a shepherd, huntsman, fisherman type.
5. The child is raised by or given over to the local king.
6. In many stories, an animal intervenes—Paris by a bear, Aegisthus by a goat, Cyrus by a dog bitch, etc.
7. The children grow and show signs of great aptitude.
8. There is a recognition in which their true identity is revealed.
9. There is familial violence—Oedipus, Romulus and Remus, Moses and the Egyptian.
10. The prophecy is fulfilled.

Twins (Greek Foundation Twins)

The mythological motif of twins inherent in the Romulus and Remus myth may be a reflection of the dual nature of early Roman republican society with its political institutions, such as twin consuls and tribunes, and the division of the patricians and plebeians.

The Fig Tree: Ficus Ruminalis

The fig tree was located on the bank of the Tiber at the southwest corner of the Palatine Hill. The fig was regarded as a natural symbol of fertility, the white juice of the fig resembling breast milk. The Latin term *ruminalis* may be derived from "ruma," meaning breast. The tree, which Livy reported as existing in his day, seems to have stood as a symbol of the nurturing quality of the Roman soil and a reminder of the suckling of the twins by the she-wolf.

The She-Wolf

The she-wolf seems to be a very old part of the myth. The famous statue known as the "Capitoline Wolf," which can be seen today in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, dates from the sixth century BCE. Another statue of the she-wolf with the twins, now lost, was set up next to the sacred fig tree in 296 BCE by two brothers, Roman officials, called Ogulnius, and the image of the she-wolf appeared on the first Roman silver coins minted in 269 BCE. The mention of the cave of the Lupercal and the account of Remus being captured at the Lupercalia is a strong link to the wolf-men of the Arcadian rites.

Faustulus and Acca Larentia

The name Faustulus may be an allusion to Faunus, either the mythical king of the Arcadians who emigrated to Italy or the god Faunus, the Roman spirit of the wild who is equated with the Greek god Pan. The name Faunus is also linked to the term "Faustus," which means lucky.

Faustulus' wife was called Acca Larentia, a minor Roman goddess connected with the rites of the dead and the Underworld. In some traditions, she was regarded as a prostitute and was said to have bequeathed her property to the people of Rome. Also, the term "lupa" (wolf) was a common slang term for whore. Both Cato and Livy mention this connection. The motif of the benevolent prostitute in traditional myth can also be seen in the personages of Ruth, Mary Magdalene, and the whore with the heart of gold found as a character type in Roman comic drama. There was another myth that named her as

Fabula, another common name for prostitutes. This tradition related her to the Fabula who was the lover of Hercules, apparently his prize after he won a game of dice.

Death of Remus

Why is Remus killed? The death of Remus at the hands of his brother or brother's henchmen has been a troubling feature of this myth since antiquity. The dispute between the brothers may be a reflection of the rivalry between the Romans and Sabines or a reflection of the ongoing conflict between the patricians and the plebeians.

Remus may also have been a human sacrifice, either as part of the Lupercalia tradition in which a boy is offered up for death, or as a foundation sacrifice. Excavations at the remains of the Temple of Victory in Rome have unearthed a grave under a wall that may indicate this type of human sacrifice, in which the victim is buried in the foundation. Evidence of actual human sacrifice in Roman culture is rare but does exist, usually connected with the foundation of cities. In Greek culture, the grave of a dead hero could bring great benefits to a community.

The motif of brother killing brother, or fratricide, is found in other mythic traditions:

- Cain and Abel (Hebrew)
- Osiris and Seth (Egyptian)
- Eteocles and Polynices (Greek)

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. Why does Alba Longa hold an important place in Roman mythology?
2. Who is Rhea and why is she important in Roman mythology?

Suggested Reading

Cornell, T.J. *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*. London: Routledge, 1995.

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Wiseman, Timothy P. *Remus: A Roman Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Websites to Visit

1. *Romulus* by Plutarch, written 75 CE, trans. by John Dryden -classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/romulus.html
2. Southwest Missouri State University website: Selections from book one of Livy (chapters three through seven are pertinent to this lecture) - courses.smsu.edu/jjh117f/GEP397/resROM/sources/001.htm
3. Fordham University's Ancient History Sourcebook: "Numa: The Institutions of Roman Religion, 7th Cent. BCE," from William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: *Rome and the West,* pp. 9-15 - www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/7Cnuma.html

Lecture 7:
The Seven Kings of Rome

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read T.J. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars:* (chapter 4: "The Rise of the City-State" and chapter 5: "Traditional History: Kings, Queens, Events and Dates").

The Seven Kings of Rome: Myth or History?

There is strong evidence of a type of monarchy in Rome during this period. Archaeological remains, especially Tombs, show a marked increase of wealth and concentration of family prestige. As Rome developed during this period, an aristocratic class grew concerned with protecting property rights and familial inheritance.

This is reflected in the naming system in central Italy that accentuated the patriarchal line. It is interesting to note that in the legends of early Italy we have mythical characters with one name, such as Evander, Latinus, or Romulus. The first king after Romulus, however, Numa Pompilius, has two names, reflecting this tradition of stressing the importance of the family.

THE SEVEN KINGS
753–509 BCE

Romulus
Numa Pompilius
Tullus Hostilius
Ancus Marcius
Tarquinius Priscus
Servius Tullius
Tarquinius Superbus

Whether the kings of Rome were real, mythic, or a combination of both is not known. However, the historical and archaeological evidence would seem to point to a non-hereditary system of sole leaders. These "kings" seem to have been elected by the patrician senators, affirmed by the Roman people, and recruited from outside Rome. In many of the legends connected with the seven kings, they marry daughters or female relatives of the former king, establishing an aristocratic connection and also a sense of the outsider of low-status origins making good in a new society.

This motif may reflect the cultural development of Rome that was attracting immigrants from other Italian and Greek communities and quickly absorbing new influences in art, architecture, politics, military organization, the law, and land reform.

Romulus (753–717 BCE)

On the death of his brother, Romulus became the first sole king of Rome. One of his first acts was to offer asylum on the Capitoline Hill for all Italian fugitives. Early Rome became a collection of brigands, outcasts, herdsmen, and criminals. Romulus knew that his new city needed to survive more than one generation, and so he sent out embassies to other Italian cities to find women to come to his new city. Rome's reputation meant that his appeals were refused.

Rape of the Sabine Women

Romulus invited their neighbors the Sabines and their wives to a holy festival, the Consulia. Romulus gave a signal and the Roman men rushed into the Sabine crowd and carried off the Sabine women. Romulus went around the captive women and told them they would be well treated and in time come to love their new husbands.

Titus Tatius and Tarpeia

The next campaigning season, the Sabine leader, Titus Tatius, made war on Rome and laid siege to the Capitol.

Tarpeia was the daughter of a prominent Roman in charge of guarding the Capitoline.

Some mythic traditions see her as a heroine attempting to dupe the Sabine enemy, others as a traitor. According to the myth, she had seen that the Sabines wore golden arm clasps and sought a secret meeting with Titus Tatius, the Sabine king. She told him that she would give him her father's keys to the gates if the Sabines gave her the things all Sabines wore on their left arms. Tatius readily agreed and swore a sacred oath.

The following night Tatius came with his best men, as agreed with Tarpeia. She opened the gates, then pretended that the Sabines had already taken the hill, urging her fellow Romans to flee. The Sabines took the hill without having to fight, and Tarpeia demanded her reward. Tatius agreed that he would give her the thing the Sabines wore on their left arms. So he took off his huge shield and flung it at her, urging the other Sabines to do the same. Tarpeia was killed by the blows and buried under a pile of shields.

Another version of the myth has Tarpeia tricking the Sabines into giving up their shields and then turning them unprotected over to her father's men.

The Tarpeian Rock was a steep cliff on the Capitoline Hill where the Romans executed traitors by throwing them to their deaths. If a Roman legion deserted in battle and lost its eagle, the symbol of the legion, the men would be lined up along the Tarpeian Rock and one man in ten would be randomly selected and pushed off. This was known as decimation.

This myth has some credibility problems in that the Capitol was not part of Rome during the time of Romulus. It was not incorporated into Rome until the sixth century BCE. Also, the Sabines were not known for their golden armbands. The Celts, however, were, and this may be a myth transferred from the traditional stories told of the Celtic occupation of Rome that was supposed to have taken place around 390 BCE.

There was a shrine to Tarpeia on the Capitol that received offerings. This fact may have led some ancient historians to put a patriotic Roman spin on the myth. But the shrine may be much older and Tarpeia may have originally been a goddess of a nearby spring.

Battle of Romans and Sabines

Eventually, the captured Sabine women intervened in the fighting and parted the warriors by placing their babies between the fighters. Romulus and Tatius made peace.

The two sides agreed to merge into one people and live in Rome. Romulus and Titus Tatius would rule jointly. This myth may indicate the origins of the shared power between the two consuls of the Roman Republic. Three major Roman families—Valerii (Valerius), Claudii (Tiberius and Claudius), and Fabii (Fabius Pictor and a number of Consuls)—were Sabine.

Who Were the Sabines?

The Sabines lived northeast of Rome on the western side of the Tiber in the hills of the Apennine Mountains. The archaeological record indicates that Sabine culture was as developed as the Latin tribes during the Iron Age and that they spoke an Italian dialect called Oscan. The Sabines feature prominently in the foundation myths of Rome. Some scholars have assumed that this may be a reflection of an Indo-European mythic motif where two warring and opposing tribes, one known for its warlike spirit and bravery and the other for wealth and political organization, combined to form one balanced community.

The myths may reflect actual conflicts with the Sabines and the cultural exchange between the two peoples:

- The stealing and incorporation of the Sabine women.
- The sharing of power with Titus Tatius (although he is never counted as one of the seven kings of Rome in his right).
- The mythic tradition that two Roman kings, Numa and Ancus Marcius, were both Sabine and were credited with bringing religious and civic reforms.
- The Roman god Quirinus, who was associated with Romulus, was claimed to have been originally Sabine. Quirinus is close to Mars in his attributes and has been viewed as a more peaceful and political version of the god of war.
- The temple of Quirinus was located on the Quirinal Hill, which was named for him. In Roman myth, this is the hill occupied by the Sabines.

The Death of Romulus

The death of Romulus is shrouded in mythic mystery. Most myths assert that he disappeared and became the god Quirinus after his father Mars came down to Earth and carried him up to Heaven.

Another tradition noted by Plutarch is that Romulus may have been murdered by a group of patrician senators who killed him in the Temple of Vulcan. Then they carved up his body, hiding the parts under their clothes, and scattered his remains in secret.

Numa (716–674 BCE)

Numa was invited by the Romans to come from Cures, a Sabine city, to rule as the second king of Rome after Romulus. He was said to have brought the Romans many of their religious institutions, to have organized the calendar into twelve months, and to have brought important land reforms. His name may be derived from the Greek term “nomos,” meaning law.

Livy states that Numa gave the Romans the sacred shields, the Palladium (the mythical statue of Athena said to have been brought to Italy from Troy by Aeneas), and the cult of Janus, the double-faced god of peace and war. He also instituted the cult of the Vestal Virgins.

Numa brings stability, structure, religion, and culture to the wild city of Rome. He is a mythological contrast to the wild and warlike Romulus. The tradition that he brought the worship of Janus to Rome reflects the duality of the myths of Roman kingship.

Janus

Janus was the Roman god of boundaries, rather like the Greek god Hermes. The guardian of the doorway and gateway, he is depicted as a man looking both ways, inside and out like a door, but also as an ever-vigilant watchman. The month of January was named for him, and he is a god of beginnings. His cult practice involved blessing the start and end of wars. The doors to his Temple Geminus (the Twin) in the Forum were only closed at times of complete peace in the Roman world. This was said to have happened under Numa in 235 BCE. Augustus had the door closed three times during his reign.

Janus is one of the oldest Roman gods. His dual nature and affiliation with crossing boundaries and bridges connects him with Rome as a bridging point over the Tiber and a city with a rich mythic tradition in expressing duality (such as the Trojans and Latins, Romulus and Remus, Romulus and Titus Tatius, the plebeians and patricians, and the two consuls).

Pythagoras

Numa was associated with the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, who lived in Croton in Magna Graecia around 530 BCE. His religious and scientific cult had an enormous impact on the Greeks in southern Italy and subsequently on many prominent Romans. However, this association seems to be an attempt by Roman historians such as Ennius to associate the wise Numa with the teachings of Pythagoras held to be an important influence on Roman thought.

Egeria

Egeria was a divine water nymph with the power of prophecy. There was a form of divination from water called hydromancy, which was also said to have been practiced by Pythagoras. Numa and Egeria had secret evening meetings and in some myths she is his lover. Egeria came to be associated with the Carmenae, goddesses of a spring below the Caelian Hill outside one of the gates of Rome. This was where the Vestals drew their water. The Carmenae are associated with the Greek muses and Egeria took on many of the mythic attributes of a Greek muse and was the divine inspiration behind the reforms of Numa.

Jupiter

Jupiter was the primary Roman god. He was equated with Zeus as a sky god and took on many of Zeus's attributes. His name is from the Indo-European Dyew—pater—"sky-father" or "radiant sky." Like Zeus, Jupiter was associated with clouds, rain, storms, thunder, and lightning, but he was more of a symbol of patriarchy than Zeus—a symbol of fatherly supremacy. His sacred time was

the peak of the month just before the waning of the moon. Jupiter was called optimus maximus—"highest and greatest"—or rex—"The King."

He was the god of power—the Roman Triumph was dedicated to Jupiter and the protector of oaths and punisher of oathbreakers. He was often worshipped with his wife Juno and daughter Minerva, the Greek Hera and Athena.

Tullus Hostilius (673–642 BCE)

The third king of Rome, Tullus Hostilius, traditionally ruled from 637 to 642 BCE and offers a contrast to the peace-loving Numa. His name means "hostile" and his nature is warlike and ferocious. Tullus's reign was mainly known for his war against Alba Longa, the major city of the Latins and an early rival to Rome's domination of the region, along with the Sabines to the north.

Tullus was supposed to have come from the Alban town of Medullia, but his grandmother Hersilia was a Sabine. Some myths make him the son of a follower of Romulus, but Cicero maintains the tradition common in the kings of Rome, that he was a self-made man. It may have been that Tullus actually existed and was an early leader of Rome, as the Roman senate house was named the Curia Hostilia—the house of Hostillius.

The Horatii and the Curatii

The most famous myth associated with the rule of Tullus was the duel of the Horatii and Curatii. The Horatii were three Roman brothers, the Curatii, three brothers from Alba Longa. The myth is set against the backdrop of a bitter war between the two cities, a war that in reality probably took place much later in the late fifth century BCE.

The brothers were selected as champions to fight for the supremacy of their respected cities. The Romans were victorious, but only one brother survived—Horatius. When Horatius returned home to Rome, he was met by his sister, who was in tears, as she was betrothed to one of the enemy Curatii brothers. Horatius immediately killed her, enraged at her treacherous emotions, and stated, "Let every Roman woman who mourns the enemy die!" The Roman courts convicted him of taking the law into his own hands, but he was acquitted on appeal to the popular assembly.

The duel of the champions reflects an aristocratic motif in the myths connected with the kings of Rome and is akin to the heroic fighting of Homeric heroes. Horatius was made to undergo a ritual purification and reincorporation into Roman society by passing under a yoke called the *tigillum sororium.* This was at the site of the shrine to Juno Sororia, the goddess wife of Jupiter who presided over the transition of girls into adulthood and marriage.

Ancus Marcius (641–617 BCE)

Ancus was of Sabine origin and a maternal grandson of Numa. He was said to have built the first bridge across the Tiber called the Pons Sublicius and to have established Rome's first colony at the port of Ostia, developing the salt flats near there. The reign of Ancus was unremarkable except that it served the purpose of demonstrating Rome's first outward expansion.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What is the myth of the Tarpeian Rock?
2. What contributions did Numa make to Rome?

Suggested Reading

Cornell, T.J. *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Other Books of Interest

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Lecture 8:
Etruscan Kings in Rome:
Myth or History?

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read T.J. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (chapter 6: "The Myth of Etruscan Rome" and chapter 7: "The Reforms of Servius Tullius").

Tarquinius Priscus (616–579 BCE)

Tarquinius Priscus has often been called the first Etruscan king of Rome. But in mythology he is actually the son of a Greek called Demaratus who left his native Corinth in Greece and settled in the Etruscan city of Tarquinii. Demaratus had a son named Lucumo who grew up to marry an Etruscan called Tanaquil. As an outsider in Etruscan society, Lucumo found he was barred from holding high social rank, and so he left with his wife for the open city of Rome. In Rome, his talents were eagerly accepted and developed, and on the death of Ancus Marcius, he was elected king and changed his name to Lucius Tarquinius Priscus.

Priscus's reign was remembered for the wars he fought against Rome's neighbors, the Sabines and Etruscans, enlarging the Senate and Roman cavalry, instituting games, building the Cloaca Maxima, the great Roman drainage system, and bringing Etruscan craftsmen to start work building the temple of Jupiter Optimum Maximus on the Capitol.

Livy has Priscus's Etruscan wife Tanaquil constantly scheming and positioning her favorites, including the next king Servius, and Pliny reports that Priscus forced the people to build his great temple. As so many of them were committing suicide out of sheer exhaustion, he crucified the bodies of the dead and denied them burial.

As we see from later Roman historians, Tarquinius Priscus became the first of the Tarquins, a despotic "Etruscan" family finally expelled by the noble Roman patricians led by Brutus after the son of the seventh King, Tarquinius Superbus, raped Lucretia. But the early mythic tradition presents another picture, that of a self-made man who was unanimously elected by the Roman people and continued developing the city as a urban center and ever-growing power in the region.

His Etruscan name, Lucumo, actually means chief, or king, and the myth may contain a memory of a period when large bands of client followers would attach themselves to stateless leaders and fight for pay or new homes in a city that would adopt them. This motif is also found in the myth of Coriolanus. Perhaps Priscus was one such warlord, invited to bring his powerful retinue and lead Rome.

The myth also reports that he was the son of a Greek from Corinth called Demaratus, who had fled his home after Corinth had been taken over by the tyrant Cypselus. This seems to have actually happened in 657 BCE, and Pliny the Elder writes of Corinthian craftsmen who came to Etruria at this

time. This ties in with the archaeological evidence that shows large imports of Corinthian pottery in the region during this period.

Priscus was assassinated by thugs hired by the sons of Ancus Marcius, who wanted to restore the throne to their family. But Priscus's wife Tanaquil had his body secretly taken to their house, where she announced from an upper-story window to the Roman people gathered outside that her husband was still alive. This bought her the time to position her favorite, Servius Tullius, into the position of regent. Once installed, Servius banished the sons of Marcius and took on the trappings of Roman kingship. When Tanaquil felt the Romans had accepted him, she finally announced that her husband had died. The kingship passed to Servius, and his first act as ruler was to preside over the funeral of Tarquinius Priscus.

Servius Tullius (578–535 BCE)

The sixth king of Rome is a fascinating mythological character, in part because many of the stories that evolved around him seem to reflect earlier Roman mythological motifs.

Like Romulus and Remus, it was said that his birth was the result of his mother coupling with a sacred phallus that emerged from the hearth fire. He started life as a slave, perhaps the derivation of his name Servius, the son of a captured Latin noble woman named Ocresia from the city of Corniculum.

Ocresia was taken in to serve the royal house of Priscus, and her son grew up there unnoticed until Tanaquil saw a ring of flames darting around the sleeping boy's head. She took this as an omen of greatness and from then on groomed him for leadership.

Servius Tullius was said to have built the first walls around Rome, probably defensive earthworks rather than stone ramparts that were first erected much later. He was also credited with introducing important social reforms that greatly strengthened the Roman army and developed the Greek system of hoplite warfare, where citizens were organized into units and drilled to fight in line, dependent on each other for protection and tactical action.

Like his predecessor, Servius was closely associated with the Etruscans. Although he was a Latin and born a slave, he was raised by an Etruscan woman and was also affiliated with an Etruscan hero-brigand called Mastarna, a companion of the Etruscan folk hero Caelius Vibenna.

Wall paintings found at the François Tomb in Vulcii in southern Etruria show Etruscan warriors fighting in single combat against men from other Etruscan cities and Rome. This epic scene is contrasted with a nearby wall painting of the Greeks at Troy sacrificing young Trojan boys for the funeral pyre of Patroclus. Here Etruscan heroes are cast in a Greek manner like the "Seven Against Thebes" or the Roman myth of the Horatii and Curatii. Mastarna is shown with two swords (an Etruscan heroic motif) releasing his comrade Vabenna from bondage.

These paintings date from around 300 BCE and would seem to support the scholarship of the Emperor Claudius, who studied the Etruscans in detail and announced to the Roman Senate in 48 CE that he believed Mastarna and Servius to be the same man. The name Mastarna may hold a clue. It seems

to be a corruption of the Latin term “magister,” meaning leader. The term “Magister Poluli” meant a leader ruling by popular consent rather like a Greek tyrant. Could Servius Tullius have been an Etruscan or Latin comrade of Vibenna who went on to rule Rome?

Who Were the Etruscans?

The idea of the origin of the Etruscans has been framed with mysterious and mythological notions ever since Greek and Roman writers began to comment on them. Many of these ideas still persist today:

- The Etruscans were Trojans escaping the sack of their city.
- They came from Lydia in Asia Minor.
- They were Phoenicians from Tyre, in modern day Lebanon.
- They possessed an advanced culture that had an enormous influence on Rome.
- Rome may have been under direct Etruscan control beginning with the reign of Tarquinius Priscus.

So who were the mysterious Etruscans? Where did they actually come from and what role did they play in the mythology of Rome?

The Etruscans were known to the Greeks as Tyrrhenians, or Tyrsenians, and to the Romans as Etrusci, or Tusci. They called themselves the Rasenna. They inhabited the region of Italy on the west coast between the Arno river to the north and the Tiber to the south. The Etruscan culture reached its height from the eighth to fifth century BCE, when the region saw the development of a number of strong, independent city-state communities that traded with the Greeks, Latins, Campanians, Celts, and the Greeks of southern Italy and Sicily, Coastal Spain, and France.

The Etruscans were rather like the Greeks in that they were united by a shared language, religion, and culture, but were never a nation in the political sense. Some of the city-states often formed federations and became trading partners. Others were bitter rivals and often went to war with each other.

The main Etruscan settlements were Volaterrae, Populonia, Vetulonia, and Rusellae in the north; Arretium, Cortona, Perusia, Clusium (Chiusi), and Volsinii in the hills; and Veii, Caere, Tarquinii, and Vulci in the south. They left a profound mark on the culture of Italy if only in the name of the region and the sea it lays off—Tuscany and the Tyrhennian Sea.

Scholars now agree that the Etruscans were an indigenous Italian people who developed from a local Bronze Age population from at least 1200 BCE. At the height of their power in the sixth and fifth century, they controlled much of Campania to the south and up to the Po Valley in the north. They became a major Mediterranean power known well to the Greeks, who frequently traded with them.

Archaeological evidence indicates that far from being a mysterious and foreign culture that arrived fully formed in Italy, the Etruscans developed in similar fashion to their neighbors the Veneti in the north, the Umbrians to the east, the Sabines and Volsci to the southeast, and the Romans to the south. It was the Romans who eventually eclipsed them and brought them under

their control, and it is through Roman political sensibilities that we meet the Etruscans in literature through the culturally biased writings of Fabius Pictor Dionysius, Dio Cassius, Valerius Maximus, Ovid, and mainly Livy. These were writers who more often than not were expressing Roman cultural pride, often at the expense of their Etruscan neighbors.

Mythological accounts of conflicts between the Etruscans and Rome go back as far as Romulus, when Rome was said to have done battle with Veii, the closest Etruscan city to Rome. The Romans themselves created a mythology of the Etruscans in Rome through the stories of the Tarquins, especially Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud), the last king of Rome. But it was during the fourth and third centuries that Rome began to defeat and control the Etruscan cities. Veii actually fell in 396 BCE and Volsinii was raised in 264 BCE. But Etruscan language and culture remained vibrant throughout much of the region until the first century BCE, when Latin was adopted and became widespread.

One of the reasons for the Etruscan "mystery" is their language, which remains difficult to explain. Although it uses a version of the Greek alphabet, it does not seem to be Indo-European and is otherwise unknown. It appears to be a simple language and most of the inscriptions found are formulaic and not complex. Scholars have identified approximately 200 Etruscan words.

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in Athens in the fifth century BCE, claimed that they came from Lydia in modern-day Turkey, and many modern scholars followed this notion, corroborating the archaeological evidence of urban development in the eighth century with the theory that an advanced culture must have arrived and taken over older, indigenous settlements. The Etruscans could have migrated from the east, but it would have to have been much earlier and we have no evidence for this. The archaeological evidence of the eighth century is explained by the "Orientalizing" of the Tyrhennian coast by trade with the Greek colonies of Southern Italy and Sicily.

There is no doubt that the Etruscans had an important influence in Rome. We know that the Temple of Jupiter built on the Capitoline at the end of the sixth century BCE was built by craftsmen from Veii and that the Etruscan cities had superb drainage systems, advanced architecture, and beautiful figurative art. But this was more likely a cultural exchange, and scholars are now seeing the development of Italian culture during this period as a "cultural koine," a commonality of Greek influence spreading across the peninsula bringing works of art, dramatic performances, military reforms, architectural ideas, technology, commerce, religious, and mythological influences.

The Aristonothos Krater

This idea of cultural exchange and Greek influence can be indicated by the Aristonothos Krater, a wine mixing bowl dating from the mid-seventh century BCE and known as one of the earliest Greek vases to have been signed by the artists. It is also one of the earliest vase paintings to depict a known Homeric motif, the myth of the blinding of Polyphemus the Cyclops by Odysseus and his shipmates.

For all its important landmarks in Greek art, this vase was actually found in an Etruscan tomb in Cerveteri. The signature may be in a Euboean script and

the vase may have come through the Euboean colony of Cumae. This prized possession found itself in the tomb of a wealthy Etruscan, who must have known something of the myth depicted and either been able to read or at least appreciate the Greek script.

Depictions of popular Greek myths have been found on both imported Greek and domestic Etruscan wares depicting such scenes as Odysseus and Scylla, Medea, the Birth of Athena, the Seven Against Thebes, Theseus and the Minotaur, Herakles, and many Trojan war scenes. Many of these myths were appropriated by the Etruscans into local legends involving Etruscan heroes.

Like the Romans, the Etruscans came under the creative influences of Greek culture and participated fully in the cultural exchange that was sweeping Italy from the eighth century. The Etruscans probably influenced Rome to the same degree that early Rome (just one city among many Latin communities) influenced the Etruscans.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. Who was said to have built the first walls around Rome?
2. What role did the Etruscans play in Roman mythology?

Suggested Reading

Cornell, T.J. *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Other Books of Interest

Borrelli, Federica, and Maria Christina Targia. *The Etruscans: Art, Architecture, and History*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004.

Grant, Michael. *Roman Myths*. Chapter 5. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

Haynes, Sybille. *Etruscan Civilization: A Cultural History*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000.

Spivey, Nigel, and Simon Stoddart. *Etruscan Italy*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1990.

Lecture 9:
Myths of the Republic

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read T.J. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (chapter 8: "The Power of Rome in the Sixth Century" and chapter 9: "The Beginnings of the Roman Republic").

The Rise of Tarquin

The last king of Rome was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (434–510 BCE), also known as "Tarquin the Proud." More mythological events are associated with his rule than any of the other seven kings except perhaps Romulus.

He was said to have been the grandson of Tarquinius Priscus. Although Fabius Pictor has him as the son, this seems unlikely if we examine the traditional chronology of the kings. What is important here is that he is another member of the Tarquin family and is portrayed as a tyrant and a danger to the future of Rome.

Most of the myths of Tarquin come to us via Livy, Dionysius, and fragments of Fabius Pictor, but his name becomes a metaphor for tyrannical behavior in other notable Roman writers such as Cicero. The republican reformer Tiberius Gracchus is compared to Tarquin, as is the conspirator Cataline and Julius Caesar, whose own assassination was framed by strong references to Tarquin, especially the role of Brutus.

According to Livy, Tarquin became involved with the daughter of Servius Tullius, who was named Tullia. She was married to another member of the Tarquin family called Arruns Tarquinius. Tullia persuaded Tarquin to murder her husband, marry her, and take power in Rome by assassinating her father.

Tarquin seized the aged Servius from the senate house and in full view of the Roman patricians threw him down the steps and into the street below. The king's retinue ran for their lives, and as Servius stumbled through the streets of Rome, he was set upon by Tarquin's paid assassins and brutally murdered. The idea for this crime was said to have been at Tullia's suggestion, and when she appeared in the forum in an open carriage to hail her husband as the new king, all Rome knew it.

Tarquin begged her to go home in case the crowd gathered in the Forum became violent. On the way home, she saw her father's body lying dead in the road. At that she drove her carriage over her father's corpse, splattering her clothes with blood, which she brought with her into the house to curse the future reign of her husband.

Like Tanaquil before her, the myth of Tullia carries all the motifs of Greek mythology as she becomes a dangerous, uncontrollable, and vengeful female manipulator in the mold of a Clytemnestra, Electra, or Medea.

The Kingship of Tarquin

Tarquinius Superbus was said to have captured a number of surrounding Latin towns, and he placed the Latin League under direct Roman control. He was also said to have negotiated the first peace treaty between Rome and Carthage and completed the construction of the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill.

He was also said to have captured the Latin city of Gabii (Torre di Catoglione). The treaty between Rome and Gabii could still be seen in the time of Augustus preserved on an ox-hide shield in the temple of Semo Sancus in Rome.

But Gabii fell to Tarquin not by military prowess or bravery, but by trickery. He had installed his son Sextus as a citizen of the city and he had won favor with the people there, heading a coup against the leading citizens. One myth detailing the ruthlessness of the Tarquins was a story that Sextus went to his father in his garden and asked him what he should do with the leaders of Gabii. Tarquin said nothing, but lobbed the heads off a group of poppies he was growing. Sextus knew what it meant and ordered the men beheaded.

There's much in the mythology of Tarquin's rule that parallels the stories told of the historical tyrants of Greece at this time. As later writers reconstructed the mythic tradition, these Greek motifs were applied to all three Tarquins: Priscus, Superbus, and Sextus.

The Athenian historian Herodotus, writing in the fifth century, tells a similar story; the tyrant of Miletus, Thrasybulus, told the tyrant of Corinth, Periander, how to rule by taking him for a walk and breaking off the highest ears of corn as he went.

Like their Greek counterparts, the Roman kings were outsiders invited to rule by popular consent, or they seized power by force. They often secured their positions by marrying into the ruling family and they had an ongoing acrimonious relationship with the leading men and nobility of the city.

The terra-cotta statues of Minerva and Hercules from the temple site at Saint Umbano also may reflect a system of tyranny based on the Greek model. Herodotus told a famous story of the rise to power of the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus. He publicly associated himself with the notion his leadership was blessed by the gods by finding a very tall, striking girl in the Athenian countryside, dressing her up as the goddess Athena, and riding in a chariot with her into the city. If nothing else, this was a wonderful piece of political theatre.

The Greek tyrants were responsible for commissioning many building programs and artistic works, and in Athens, they were associated with the organizing of dramatic festivals. In effect, they kept control by attaching themselves to the glorification of the gods. The tradition that Tarquinius Priscus started the Temple of Jupiter and that Tarquinius Superbus completed it is a Roman version of this Greek mythic motif.

Sophocles' play *Oedipus Tyrannus* was produced in Athens in the 430s soon after the drastic policies of one man, Pericles, had resulted in a great plague. This work also contains the same mythological message about the strengths and weaknesses of a popular tyrant. Oedipus is forced into action

by the people, who turn to him in a time of great national need. He cannot fail them. If he does, he can no longer hold popular power. Yet the unilateral decision-making authority of just one man has disastrous results.

The myth of the expulsion of Tarquin contains the same type of anti-tyrannical motifs and became a rallying cry for the elite Roman upper class. In this sense, the myth of Tarquin can be viewed as the manipulation of a political elite to regain power from a popular leader who had gradually been eroding their importance. Tarquinius Priscus doubled the size of the Senate, thus creating more members of the patrician class and making it less exclusive. He also bolstered the Roman upper middle class with his reorganization of the Roman cavalry that formed the equite class. Servius went further, instituting major land reforms that mirrored the work of the Athenian leader Cleisthenes, developing the power of the agricultural and urban working population in both military and political affairs.

The tales of the expulsion of Tarquin the Proud from Rome were mainly circulated by historians such as Fabius Pictor, Dionysius, and Livy—men all favorable in one way or another to Rome's ruling elite. They had a vested interest in perpetuating the myth of a sex-crazed, uncontrollable despotic family in order to support the claim of their peers that only the nobility of Rome could rule their city effectively.

The Rape of Lucretia

The story of the rape of Lucretia has become one of the most famous of all Roman myths. Immortalized by Livy, Ovid, Shakespeare, and Macaulay to name a few, this tale of the abuse of power and Roman stoicism still seizes the imagination.

The main points of the myth:

- Brutus accompanies the sons of Tarquin to Delphi and hears an oracle foretell that the first man to kiss his mother will inherit Rome. Brutus pretends to trip and secretly kisses the earth.
- Lucretia was the wife of another Tarquin named Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus.
- A son of Tarquin called Sextus forced himself on Lucretia while her husband was away by threatening to kill her and then said she was sleeping with a slave.
- The next day Lucretia called her male relatives together, told them what Sextus had done, and then killed herself.
- The family of Lucretia, Brutus, and Publius Valerius Poplicola swore an oath to drive Sextus and Superbus from Rome and never again allow only one man to rule Rome.
- Brutus roused the people of Rome against Tarquin. When Tarquin came back to the city from a military campaign in Ardea, he found the gates closed against him.
- Tarquin fled to the Etruscan city of Caere. His son Sextus ran to Gabii, where he was murdered.

- Brutus and Publicola expelled all the Tarquins and became the first consul of the new Roman Republic.

The Fight for the Early Republic

Brutus learned that his two sons had become embroiled in a plot to restore the Tarquins. Like a true noble paterfamilias, he epitomized the new spirit of the Republic by personally condemning his own sons to death. In so doing, he severed his claim to any kind of hereditary aristocracy and became the first pure symbol of Republican Rome, where duty to the state came first above all.

During this time Tarquin had managed to convince the Etruscan cities of Veii and Tarquinii to intervene and attack Rome in an effort to regain control of the city. At the battle of Silva Arsia, the Romans defeated the Etruscans, but Brutus lost his life by engaging in a heroic single combat with Arruns Tarquinius, the son of Superbus, who was also killed.

Lucius Junius Brutus is an important mythological Roman, not only because his family were noted patricians and held several important positions during the Republic, but also because of Marcus Junius Brutus, the leader of the assassination of Julius Caesar. He claimed he was acting in part because of the tradition inherent in his family as tyrant killers and the protectors of Rome against monarchy.

Valerius Poplicola was also the namesake of an important Roman patrician family, the Valerii, who also claimed to have been Sabine. Once again, the Sabines appear in a foundation myth of Rome—this time the foundation of the Republic. The name "Poplicola" appears to be from *populum colere,* "preferring the people."

Horatius at the Bridge

- Tarquin appealed to the Etruscan king of Clusium, Lars Porsena, to attack Rome. In 508 BCE, Porsena laid siege to the city, taking the Janiculum Hill.
- As Porsena advanced, the Romans in the surrounding countryside fled into the city across the one bridge over the Tiber, the wooden Pons Sublicius.
- The Etruscans had to take the bridge in order to advance against the city, and as the Romans fled, one man, Horatius Cocles, decided to stand and fight as his comrades chopped down the bridge from the Roman side.
- Horatius stood at the bridge with just two companions, Spurius Lartius and Titius Herminius, and held off wave after wave of Etruscan attackers. As the bridge began to fall, Horatius ordered his comrades back and held the enemy off on his own.
- Finally, as the bridge fell, Horatius prayed to the God of the Tiber and jumped into the waters fully armed, swimming to the Roman bank and to safety.

Mucius Scaevola

Other heroic Roman exploits included that of Mucius Scaevola, who entered the Etrucsan camp alone and attempted to kill Porsena. When he was captured, he was told he would be tortured. Scaevola responded by placing his hand in a fire and holding it there until it burned to show the enemy the resolve of the Romans.

The Demise of Tarquin

- After experiencing so many brave Roman acts, Porsena withdrew his troops and made peace with Rome.
- Tarquin continued to make trouble, organizing a revolt of the Latin League that was defeated at the battle of Lake Regillus.
- Tarquin fled to the Greek city of Cumae, where he was a guest of the tyrant known as Aristodemus the Effeminate.
- Tarquin died there in exile in 495 BCE and the Roman Republic was free of its "tyrannical" king.

The date of the expulsion of Tarquin the Proud is traditionally placed as 510 BCE. The very same year that Hippias, the son and successor of the tyrant Pisistratus, was driven from Athens. He later returned with the Persian invasion of Darius that was defeated at the battle of Marathon in 490. The date is therefore spurious and seems part of the general tradition of borrowing from Greek sources in constructing Roman myth. But it does seem that some time around 500 BCE there was a shift from tyranny to a republican system of government, although the transition from tyranny to republic may have been more gradual, perhaps caused by a foreign invasion (some sources have Lars Porsena invading Rome), or a result of influences from Athens and other parts of the Greek world experiencing similar political shifts.

Archaeology also provides evidence of social unrest around 500 BCE. It seems that the Regia, the Comitium, and the temple at Sant'Omobono were all destroyed. Furthermore, the temple was not rebuilt for at least another 100 years and was closely associated with the kings.

LARS PORSENA AND HORATIUS AT THE BRIDGE

Lars Porsena of Closium
By the Nine Gods he swore
That the great house of Tarquin
Should suffer wrong no more.
By the Nine Gods he swore it,
And named a trysting day,
And bade his messengers ride forth,
East and west and south and north,
To summon his array.

~Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay
First Baron, 1842

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. Why is the rape of Lucretia one of the most famous Roman myths?
2. Why did Brutus condemn his sons to death?

Suggested Reading

Cornell, T.J. *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Other Books of Interest

Crawford, Michael. *The Roman Republic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Livy. *The Early History of Rome*. Book 2. Trans. Aubrey De Selincourt. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *Lays of Ancient Rome*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishers, 1998 (1842).

Ogilvie, R.M. *Early Rome and the Etruscans*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983.

Lecture 10:
Myths of Roman Expansion

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read T.J. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (chapter 10: "Patricians and Plebeians" and chapter 12: "Wars and External Relations 506-345 BC").

The Dioscuri: The Saviors of Lake Regillus

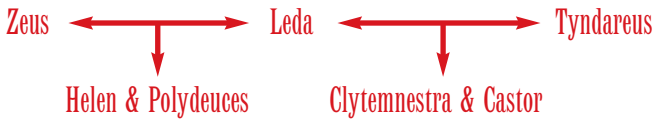
The battle of Lake Regillus in 499 BCE became a mythological metaphor for the struggles of the early Roman republic against its Latin neighbors. According to a well-known Roman myth, during the battle, two godlike men on horseback suddenly appeared and entered the battle on the side of the Romans, leading their cavalry against the Latin forces and ensuring victory.

It was later reported in Rome that two beautiful young men appeared in the Forum and proceeded to wash down their magnificent horses at the spring of Juturna near the temple of Vesta. They attracted a large crowd and were asked for news of the battle. They spoke of a huge Roman victory and then left the Forum never to be seen again. The Romans concluded that these two young men must have been the divine twins, Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus—the Dioscuri.

Dionysius tells us that the Romans erected a temple to Castor and Pollux in the Forum at the very spot where they appeared. The spring where they watered their horses was regarded as sacred and received yearly sacrifices made in their honor. There was also a large ceremonial procession made by the Roman knights wearing purple and gold victory robes and crowned with olive branches. This grand parade started at the Temple of Mars outside the city walls and wound its way through Rome, passing the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum.

Castor and Polydeuces

Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux) were twin brothers born of Leda, the daughter of king Thestius from Aetolia in Greece. Leda was a famous beauty and married the powerful king of Sparta, Tyndareus. But Leda's beauty did not escape the notice of that divine philanderer, Zeus, and he came to her as a swan, grabbed her by the nape of the neck and made love to her. That same night Tyndareus also lay with his wife. The result was four very famous mythological children.



This was the Helen who was married to Menelaus and was taken to Troy by Paris, causing the ten-year-long Trojan War. Her sister Clytemnestra was married to Agamemnon and killed him in revenge for his sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigenia.

Castor and Polydeuces were twins, but one was divine and one was mortal. They were raised in Sparta and underwent various mythic exploits:

- They rescued their sister Helen after she was abducted by Theseus, the prince of Athens.
- While in Athens, they carried off Theseus's mother Aethra, who became Helen's lady in waiting.
- They served with Jason as Argonauts, helping him to recover the Golden Fleece.

But one cattle raid, when the boys were carrying off Phoebe and Hilaeira, the daughters of King Leucippus, went wrong and Castor was killed. The distraught Polydeuces could not bear to part with his brother, so he unselfishly offered to give up half his immortality and share it with Castor so that he might live again. From then on, the Dioscuri became equally divine and equally mortal, spending one day in the underworld and one day on Olympus.

Nature of the Dioscuri

- The Dioscuri are mentioned in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and were known to Hesiod and Pindar.
- They were closely associated with Sparta but were also very popular in Athens.
- They became gods of epiphany, semidivine saviors in moments of great crisis.
- Many of the myths associated with the Dioscuri demonstrate how they rewarded faith and trust.
- One legend tells of how the poet Simonides gave a recital of a new work for the Thessallian king Scopas. But Scopas was displeased with the performance because it praised the Dioscuri more than him and refused to pay the poet or offer him hospitality. Later that night, two mysterious youths (the Dioscuri) beckoned Simonides outside just as the roof of Scopas's palace fell in, killing all inside, including the king.
- There were many stories circulating of the Dioscuri appearing to help athletes win competitions and inspiring men to win victories on the battlefield.
- The Dioscuri were also said to have been saviors of sailors in peril on the sea, and the Greeks believed that the phenomena known today as St. Elmo's fire was a sign of the presence of the divine twins.

The Dioscuri in Italy

The Dioscuri probably came to Italy by way of the Greek colonies in the South. The Spartan colony of Tarrentum had an important shrine to Castor and Polydeuces, and a local legend told of how Locris and Croton, Greek cities in southern Italy, went to war and the Locrians appealed to Sparta for help. The Spartans offered the blessings of the Dioscuri, who appeared in the battle on the side of the Locrians, and Croton was defeated.

The archaeological record would seem to support the myth in that the worship of the Dioscuri in Rome and Latium was established around the time of the foundation of the Republic. In 1959, a bronze plaque was discovered in Lavinium near the shrine of the thirteen altars that was inscribed with a dedication to Castor and Pollux, dating from the late sixth century BCE.

In 1985, a Danish excavation at the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum has shown that the structure dates to the early fifth century BCE. The Romans may have attached a mythological significance to their new republic by attaching its fortunes to the blessings of the sons of Zeus, providing a link with the founding twins of Rome, Romulus and Remus, and also using a popular Greek legend to show their dominance over their Latin neighbors.

The Dual Nature of Rome: The Patricians and Plebeians

Patricians

The patricians were the members of the Roman social elite who thrived under the monarchy and developed an infrastructure of wealth, power, and political gain. These great families stamped their mark on Republican Rome.

Many of the early Roman historians constructed their accounts to glorify the house of their noble patron or family members. This is certainly the case with Fabius Pictor of the Fabii, who was keen to place his illustrious family front and center in Roman history. This familial jostling of the mythological and historical record accounts for many of the disparities that have emerged.

Plebeians

The plebeians were members of the craftsmen and agricultural class who increasingly found themselves squeezed out of political influence as the ever-expanding city-state of Rome grew.

Massive debt, land hunger, and food shortages constantly afflicted the plebeian class, and in 494 BCE, this led to the first *secessio*, a mass defection of plebeians from Rome to the Sacred Mount, a hill a few miles upstream of the Tiber.

The plebeians set up an alternative state with its own governing council called the concilium plebis and elected officials called Tribunes and Aediles. They also established a new temple to Ceres, Liber, and Libera on the Aventine Hill.

According to legend, the plebs were convinced to return to Rome by the patrician elder statesman Agrippa Menenius, who told them a parable of the belly and the body that was famously re-created by Shakespeare in his play *Coriolanus.*

Coriolanus

Shakespeare took the fable of Menenius and applied it to the opening of his tragedy Coriolanus, his story of a great war leader who was unable to bend his will before the plebeians. Coriolanus was banished from Rome and turned against his city.

The story of Coriolanus acts as a mythological motif for the ongoing struggle among the social orders in Rome. Both Livy and Plutarch tell his story and he is mentioned by Fabius Pictor.

Gaius Marcius Coriolanus was named after the Volscian city of Corioli, which was taken by the Romans in 493 BCE. At first he was honored as a great war hero, but was exiled after he opposed the distribution of grain to the plebeians.

He went over to the Volscians in the city of Antium and led their forces against the Latin allies, defeating many of them before besieging Rome itself.

He was persuaded to relent by his mother Verturia (Volumnia in Plutarch and Shakespeare) and his wife Virgilia. He was then killed by his Volscian allies, who were enraged at the betrayal.

One fascinating aspect of the story is that Coriolanus seems not to have been a patrician, as the Marcii family was plebeian. Like the legends of the Roman kings, this seems to be another example of a myth or rapid social mobility resulting in the fall of the protagonist.

Coriolanus's defection to the Volsces certainly reflects the movements of some of the Roman kings such as Numa, who took power in Rome after holding leading positions in other cities. This could be another mythological reflection of archaic leadership during this period, where powerful warlords with faithful retinues would move between different city-states.

Reforms, including land allotments from Rome's new colonies, the adoption of new social codes, such as the Twelve Tables, and Rome's increasing dominance in central Italy led to the easement of the division between the orders.

But the nobility grew stronger, shoring up power in the Senate and establishing the *cursus honorum*—the way of honor—an upwardly mobile ranking system only open to the patrician class. This eventually incorporated the plebeian offices of Tribune and Aediles as entry-level positions for ambitious young Roman patricians.

The Volscians

The early legends of the Roman Republic articulate real historical conflicts. Coriolanus fighting against and then going over to the Volcians commemorates conflict between Rome and the Volsces dating back to the fifth century BCE.

The Volscians were originally from the central Apennines and pushed aggressively into southern Latium in the early fifth century, making several incursions into Roman territory. They were finally defeated in 431 BCE.

Virgil alludes to the Volscian threat in his epic poem *The Aeneid* by inventing the Volsce woman warrior Camilla, who allies herself against Aeneas.

Marcus Furius Camillus

Like Coriolanus, Marcus Furius Camillus was another Roman war hero forced into banishment for arrogance against the plebeians after his great victory over the Etruscan city of Veii.

Many of the early Republican legends deal with Rome's struggle against her neighbors as the city-states in central Italy jostled for dominance. Veii was only ten miles to the north of Rome and shared a border with the city along the Tiber. The two cities were age-old rivals, and it seemed inevitable that they should fight three successive wars.

The First Veientine War (483–474 BCE)

- The Veientines marched into Roman territory and occupied the Janiculum Hill. A private army of 306 Romans organized by the Fabian family went out to meet them and were all killed except one boy, who alone would continue the illustrious Fabian name.
- This story certainly has shades of the battle of Thermopylae, when 300 Spartans held off a vastly superior Persian force for three days before being wiped out except for a sole survivor.
- This story articulates the last time a Roman family fought a private battle in defense of their own property. The Fabii disappeared from the Consul roles after 479, the date of the massacre, until 467, when Quintus Fabius Vibulanus, the sole survivor, assumed the consulship.

The Second Veientine War (437 BCE)

Hostilities between Rome and Veii erupted again when the tyrant of Veii Lars Tolumnius brutally murdered four Roman diplomats. A Roman warrior named Aulus Cornelius Cossus killed Tolumnius in single combat.

The Third Veientine War (406–396 BCE)

- The ten-year duration of the conflict and the stories told of it conjure up images of *The Iliad* and the ten-year siege of Troy.
- In times of national crisis, the Romans would appoint a dictator, a temporary supreme commander. They chose Marcus Furius Camillus to lead them against Veii.
- Camillus captured a prophet from Veii who told him that the city would not fall until the Alban lake drained dry. Camillus consulted the oracle at Delphi and set about draining the lake. He then tunneled beneath the city.
- When the Romans in the tunnel were under the place of Veii, they heard the king declare that whoever offered a sacrifice to Juno in the temple would be victorious. At this, the Romans burst out of the earth and performed the sacrifice themselves. This “Trojan Horse” style attack led to the Romans taking the city.
- Camillus transferred the shrine of Juno to Rome and sent the spoils to Delphi. This myth contains the motif of “evocation,” in which the god of a rival city is called out before a battle. The same motif can be found in the legends surrounding the Palladium and the fall of Troy.
- Camillus returned triumphant to Rome in a chariot pulled by four white horses. His ambition was suspected by the plebeians, and, like Coriolanus, he was convicted of corruption and forced into exile.

The Celtic Invasion

In 390 BCE a vast army of Celts from Cisalpine Gaul swept down through the Po Valley, crossed into northern Etruria, and moved down the Tiber Valley until they reached Rome. A Roman army was sent out to meet them at the river Allia and was roundly defeated.

These Celts were a Gaulish tribe called the Senones and were commanded by a chief called Brennus. According to some ancient sources, the Gauls invaded the region looking for supplies of the precursor of Montepulciano wine.

While attacking the Etruscan city of Clusium, they fought against a small Roman force that was in Clusium to negotiate a treaty between the two cities. This apparently angered the Gauls, who decided to attack Rome.

After the shocking defeat of their army, the Romans fled their city or took refuge behind the fortifications of the Capitoline Hill. Only a group of elderly patrician senators refused to leave and, according to Livy, sat in full regalia in the vestibules of their houses.

Plutarch tells a slightly different story and has the old Romans sitting in state in the Forum. The Gaulish warriors stood amazed at the sight, wondering if these men were gods or apparitions until the silence was rudely broken. One Gaul stepped up to a certain Marcus Papirius, a man with a great white beard, and gently stroked his whiskers. At this, Papirius struck him on the head with his staff. The Gaul drew his sword and killed him where he sat, and the other Gauls followed suit until all the old Romans were dead.

Meanwhile, Camillus, though in exile, put together a small force and led a successful raid against the Gauls, which greatly heartened those Romans trapped on the Capitoline Hill.

The rest of the Roman army was at Veii and moved to restore Camillus to the dictatorship. But Camillus refused, stating that he needed confirmation from Rome. One of his officers, Pontius Cominius, secretly got through the Gaulish lines and climbed up and down the Capitoline by a secret route. The desperate Romans eagerly agreed to restore his command.

But the Gauls discovered the tracks left by Cominius, and Brennus put together his best warriors and instructed them to make the climb under cover of night and take the hill. Unfortunately, the Roman guards were asleep and the Gauls were able to make their way up without being challenged.

As they neared the top, they passed the temple of Juno Moneta, where the sacred geese of the goddess were starving from the long siege and were very nervous. The Gauls woke them and their loud honking woke the Romans, who were able to grab their arms and mount a counterattack. An officer called Manilus led the Roman defense and flung the Gauls down the hill. The captain of the watch was executed for his negligence, and Manilus was rewarded for his bravery.

Eventually, the Gauls were persuaded to leave by the payment of a large ransom of gold. As the gold was being weighed, the Romans complained about the weights, whereupon Brennus threw his sword on the scale and said, “Woe to the vanquished!” Camillus then pursued the Gauls, cut them to pieces, and recovered the gold.

The Gallic Raid: Myth or History?

- Aristotle mentioned the Gallic sack of Rome.
- The Gauls may have been a band of mercenaries on their way back home after serving with Dionysius of Syracuse.
- The ransom for Rome may have been paid by the city of Caere, an Etruscan city that was competing with Syracuse and may have had a commercial interest in disrupting Dionysius's forces. The myth tells that the Vestal Virgins and sacred objects were sent there for safekeeping.
- Another version has a Roman hero of the Drusii family defeating a Gaulish chief in single combat and winning back the gold.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. Who were the Dioscuri and what was their significance in Roman mythology?
2. What were the main characteristics of the patricians and the plebeians?

Suggested Reading

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Lecture 11:
Virgil and *The Aeneid* (Part One)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Allen Mandelbaum's *The Aeneid of Virgil* (books 1–3).

The Life and Times of Virgil

Publius Vergilius Maro was born in 70 BCE in Andes, a small village near Mantua (Mantova) and the Etruscan city in Cisalpine Gaul. His family seems to have been reasonably wealthy, and he was educated in Cremona and Milan before coming to Rome. At some point, Virgil was a part of the Epicurean community in Neapolis (Naples).

Some scholars think Virgil's first collection of ten short hexameter poems was the pastoral *Eclogues* (selections), published around 39-38 BCE.

Soon after the publication of the *Eclogues,* Virgil became part of the circle of Maecenas, one of the chief aides to Octavian.

Virgil's second major work was the *Georgics*, dated around 29 BCE, a treatise on agriculture in Italy.

Throughout the 20s, Virgil worked on *The Aeneid,* but he died before it was finished, on his way back from a trip to Athens with Octavian (now named Augustus) in 19 BCE. Before he died, Virgil ordered that the manuscript of *The Aeneid* be burned. Augustus countermanded this last wish.

Virgil grew up in troubled times. Rome had been fighting a series of bitter civil wars and civil unrest for over 100 years, in which powerful military dictators had been doing battle for control of Rome.

In 44 BCE, Julius Caesar was assassinated by a group of Roman patricians led by Brutus and Cassius, who wanted to maintain the power of the Republic. Caesar's fortune was inherited by his nineteen-year-old nephew and adopted son, Octavius. He joined forces with Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) and Lepidus and defeated the conspirators at Philippi in 42 BCE.

Octavian enacted severe land reforms, confiscating property from landowners and redistributing it to newly de-mobbed soldiers.

Lepidus was pushed out of the ruling Roman triumvirate, and the empire was divided with Marcus Antonius in the east ruling from Alexandria in Egypt and Octavian in the west ruling from Rome. Civil war broke out again between Antonius and Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, on one side and Octavian on the other.

In 31 BCE, Octavian defeated his enemies at the sea battle of Actium, and Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, leaving Octavian in complete control.

In 27 BCE, the senate gave Octavian the title "Augustus" (revered) for "restoring the Republic." He had purged the Senate of dissent and taken

direct control of all military and key gubernatorial appointments, but maintained that he was only a "first among equals" and the "father of the fatherland."

Virgil was commissioned by the court of Augustus to glorify the new imperial household, and yet behind the praise questions are raised. Virgil used his poetic talents and mythological sources to fashion a new use for Roman mythology—the legitimization of the new imperial household.

Virgil and Mythology

Mythological content abounds throughout the work of Virgil. His *Eclogue VI* is a pastoral reference to the work of the Greek poet Hesiod and refers to the ages of man, the great flood, Prometheus, Hylas, Pasiphae, Atalanta, and Phaethon's sisters. He goes on to write of Scylla and the myth of Tereus and Philomela.

In *Eclogue X,* Virgil conjures Arcadia and takes this important Greek mythological motif and creates an imaginary classical pastoral landscape.

Eclogue IV has been called the Messianic Eclogue because medieval church scholars interpreted its veiled references to the ascendancy of Octavian or the offspring of the marriage of Antonius and Octavia (Octavian's sister) to a prophecy of the birth of Christ.

The *Eclogues* also contains seemingly direct and wholly negative references to the upheavals and personal pain caused by the land reforms of Octavian. These must have had a devastating effect of Virgil's family and neighbors, although Virgil had one of his characters seemingly thank Octavian for bringing peace and stability.

The Aeneid

The Aeneid is a work in twelve books of hexameter verse detailing the flight of Aeneas from Troy, his epic sea journey, his affair with Dido the queen of Carthage, and his battles in Italy to found a new city that would inspire the origins of Rome.

***The Aeneid:* Outline to Books One to Three**

Book One

- The invocation to the muse that opens *The Aeneid* is based on Homer's invocation to the muse in *The Odyssey*. This was a feature of Greek epic poetry that Virgil is emulating.
- Juno's resentment toward Aeneas is motivated by her support of the Greeks against the Trojans in the recent war. She wants the Trojan line stamped out and does not want to see Aeneas survive. She also feels slighted because she lost out to Venus in the Judgment of Paris—Venus is Aeneas's mother and Paris turned out to be a Trojan prince. She also resents her husband's affection for his Trojan cupbearer Gannymede.
- Venus appeals directly to Jupiter and reminds him of his promise to found a new Trojan line that would one day rule the world. Jupiter restates his prophecy: Aeneas shall see the walls of Lavinium and do battle with the Italians before founding a new city. Thirty years later, his son will found a

new city called Alba Longa, then 300 years after that Romulus and Remus will found the city of Mars, and the people there will enslave the sons of Agamemnon. Jupiter also foresees the birth of Julius Caesar and says that his fame shall end in the stars. Caesar will become a god and there shall be peace on earth.

- After seven years of wandering, Aeneas and his companions are in sight of the coast of Italy when Juno sends a storm driving them to north Africa. Venus meets Aeneas in disguise and sends him to Dido's new city of Carthage.
- The Trojans are met with hospitality, and through Venus's scheming, Dido falls in love with Aeneas. At a banquet, Dido asks Aeneas to tell of his wanderings.
- Book one follows books five to eight of Homer's *Odyssey* very closely. In many ways, Aeneas is similar to Odysseus, but if Odysseus encapsulates the struggle of the individual man and raises questions of identity, Aeneas suppresses his personal feelings for the greater good of the future Rome and a sense of duty.

Book Two

- At the Carthaginian banquet, Aeneas tells the story of the last night of Troy.
- He tells of the Greek trick of the wooden horse and how Laocoon, a Trojan prophet, warned, "Beware the Greeks bearing gifts." But the trickery of the Greek spy Sinon convinces the Trojans with a story that the horse was left in atonement for their theft of the Palladium.
- Laocoon and his sons are engulfed by two sea serpents. The Trojans thought that this was a sign from the gods that he was wrong to throw his spear at the horse.
- That night the Greeks, led by Ulysses and the son of Achilles, Neoptolemus, attack Troy.
- During the carnage, Aeneas sees Hector's ghost telling him to escape and found a new Troy. King Priam is slaughtered, and Aeneas gathers his family and escapes with his father Anchises and his son Ascanius (also called Iulus).
- His wife Creusa is lost in the confusion. Her ghost appears and tells him to found a new city. He sees a shooting star—a good omen and a reference to the comet that was seen at Caesar's funeral.

Book Three

- Aeneas relates his escape from Troy with a band of loyal followers. Like Odysseus, they wander on the seas for seven years.
- Thrace: Aeneas and his followers land in northern Greece and uproot foliage to festoon a sacrifice. They find the roots dripping in blood. Then Aeneas hears the voice of the Trojan Polydorus—it is his blood. Polydorus was sent to the Thracians, then allies of Troy, to gain their help, but the Thracian king went over to Agamemnon and murdered Polydorus. He tells Aeneas to get away from Thrace as fast as possible. They bury him properly and leave.

- Delos: This was the “floating island” sacred to Apollo. There Aeneas receives a prophecy: “The Land which first produced the stock from which you come, that same will take you back to her abundant breast. Seek out, then, your first mother. Here shall your house hold sway over the earth.”
- Crete: The Trojans think that the Delos prophecy indicated Crete, as Teucer had come from there, as did the cult of Cybele, the great mother. They land in Crete and build a new city called Pergamea. An epidemic struck them, and they decided to go back to Delos to ask what they should do. The Penates appear to Aeneas and tell him to go to Hesperia, where Dardanus, the legendary founder of Troy, was born—this is Italy. Anchises now remembers that Cassandra had spoken such a prophecy.
- The Island of the Harpies: Phineus is plagued by flying creatures that devour his food whenever he tries to eat. The Trojans are attacked by the Harpies and drive them away except one—Celaeno, who says that before they found their city in Italy, they will be forced to eat their plates.
- Ithaca: They sail past the home of their most hated enemy—Odysseus.
- Actium: While resting on this promontory in western Greece, Aeneas founds Trojan Games and dedicates a trophy. This is an overt reference to Octavian’s defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at the naval battle of Actium in 31 BCE.
- Buthrotum: They land in a city in northwestern Greece, where a son of Priam called Helenus has become king after Phyrrhus, the son of Achilles, had been killed by Orestes. Helenus then married Phyrrus’s spear bride, Andromache, who had been Hector’s wife. Helenus makes a prophecy; it will take Aeneas a long time to get to Italy. He will cross many dangerous waters. When he comes to a lonely river and sees a great white sow with thirty newborn piglets—this is the site he must settle. He is told not to land in western Italy, as the Greeks are there. He must be pious to Juno and consult the sibyl at Cumae.
- Sicily: In episodes that reflect the trials of Odysseus, Aeneas faces the sea serpent Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis that Virgil locates between Italy and Sicily. On Sicily, near Mt. Etna, they encounter the land of the Cyclops and meet a Greek survivor of Odysseus’s visit. As they leave the shore, they see the blind Cyclops, who rouses the other monsters and tries to sink them.
- Drepanum: They sail around Sicily, landing at Drepanum. It is here that Aeneas’s father dies. They bury him there and set sail, but are blown to Carthage by the storm sent by Juno.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What was the situation in Rome during the time of Virgil?
2. In what ways is *The Aeneid* similar to Homer's *Odyssey*?

Suggested Reading

Mandelbaum, Allen. *The Aeneid of Virgil*. New York: Bantam Classics, 1981.

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Tarn, W.W., and M.P. Charlesworth. *Octavian, Antony, and Cleopatra*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Lecture 12:
The Aeneid (Part Two)

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Allen Mandelbaum's *The Aeneid of Virgil* (books 6–12).

Dido and Aeneas

Dido was a Phoenician, the daughter of Belus, the king of Tyre. Timaeus, a Greek writer for Syracuse writing in the late fourth and early fifth century, is the earliest source for her story. According to him, her original name was Elissa. Her name Dido means wanderer and was given to her by the Libyans.

According to the myth, Dido's husband Sychaeus was murdered by her brother Pygmalion, who had become the king of Tyre as a result. Dido escaped to Libya with some followers and founded Carthage.

Virgil has Dido fall in love with Aeneas as a device of Venus. Dido had made an oath to never be with another man after the death of her husband, but her passion for Aeneas overwhelms her and the couple makes love in a cave while out on a hunt, sheltering from a storm. Dido takes this as an expression of marriage, but Aeneas does not.

Although Aeneas is desperately in love with Dido, he puts his duty and piety to his cause before his personal feelings. He leaves her in secret after Mercury descends to remind him of his task to found a new Troy in Italy.

Dido is left distraught, bitter, and angry and commits suicide on the pyre. Before she dies, she is driven to frenzy as Virgil compares her to Pentheus, driven mad at seeing the Bacchae, or Orestes, pursued by the Furies.

For the Romans, Dido, the Eastern temptress who captivated their beloved founder and nearly derailed the establishment of their line in Italy, conjured images both recent and historical.

According to Timaeus, Carthage (New Town) was a Tyrian colony founded in 814-813 BCE on the coast of northeast Tunisia. The earliest archaeological evidence comes from around 725 BCE. The site was a good anchorage for ships trading in gold, silver, and tin around the eastern Mediterranean, and soon became the main Phoenician colony because of its excellent harbor, strategic position, and fertile land.

The Romans had suffered three long and costly wars against the Carthaginians. During the first Punic War (264-241 BCE), Rome clashed with Carthage over control of Sicily, Rome's first overseas colony.

The Aeneas myth was manipulated to give the Romans a mythological precedent for making alliances with Sicilian cities such as Segesta. Virgil gives Sicily a central importance in *The Aeneid,* making the island the site of the major folkloric events of Aeneas's wanderings and also the last resting place of Anchises.

In 218, the Second Punic War erupted when Rome became embroiled in the Carthaginian possessions in southern Spain and Hannibal invaded Italy by crossing the Alps. Despite his spectacular victories over the Romans, Hannibal never managed to persuade the Italian cities to revolt against Rome, and a policy of nonengagement by the Romans eventually saw him withdraw from Italy in 204. Hannibal was finally defeated at the battle of Zama in North Africa in 202.

After their second defeat of Carthage, the Romans gained further overseas colonial possessions in Spain and the eastern Mediterranean to add to Sicily and Sardinia.

Finally, after subduing the rest of Italy, annexing Greece and parts of southern Gaul, the third Punic War lasted from 149-146 BCE and saw the complete destruction of Carthage under Scipio and the annexation of Carthaginian territories into the Roman province of North Africa.

Virgil uses the Dido myth to set a mythological context for one of Rome's most important conflicts. Also, many scholars have seen a metaphorical allusion to the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra VII of Egypt.

Cleopatra VII was the daughter of Ptolemy XII and the last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt. The Ptolemies were a Macedonian family and Ptolemy I Soter (Saviour) was a childhood friend of Alexander the Great and one of his most trusted generals. On Alexander's death in 323 BCE, he took control of Egypt and established a Greek-speaking monarchy.

Cleopatra was a direct descendant of the first Ptolemy and was Macedonian Greek and not of Egyptian blood, although the Ptolemies did adopt the court trappings of the Pharaohs. She was known to have had a love affair with Julius Caesar, who had besieged Alexandria in 48 BCE. She had a son with Caesar named Caesarion. After Caesar's death, she had a relationship with Mark Antony and they had twins Anthony Helios and Ptolemy Philadelphus.

Cleopatra was an excellent political player and managed to keep power over Egypt despite the imperial advances of Rome. She was unsuccessful, however, in persuading Octavian to her cause. She was reviled in Rome as an example of the corrupting influence of Eastern wealth and her hold over both Caesar and Antony was seen as wicked and profane. She committed suicide after her and Antony's loss to Octavian at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE.

It is not hard to see the analogy between Dido and Cleopatra. They were both Eastern potentates, beautiful, recently widowed, and possessing the power to ensnare the very best Roman men. Her tragic demise and the actions of Aeneas are still hotly debated, and it is in the Dido episode that we see an ugly side of our Roman hero. Yet the Romans may have respected Aeneas's devotion to duty in the face of overwhelming odds.

The struggle between emotion and piety is a central theme of *The Aeneid,* and it is in book six, after Aeneas visits the Underworld, when his character seems to harden and his resolve becomes strong. The rather aimless hero of the first three books, propelled by scraps of prophecies often leading him nowhere, finally takes control of his destiny.

Aeneas in the Underworld

After returning to Sicily and instituting funeral games in honor of Anchises, the Trojans finally arrive in Italy after leaving some of their party to settle in Sicily.

Aeneas goes to the Greek city of Cumae to consult the Sibyl, the prophetess of Apollo, and descend into the underworld to learn of his future from the ghost of his father. The Sybil predicts the coming conflicts with the Italian tribes. Aeneas takes a golden bough sacred to Proserpine (Persephone) that allows the bearer to return from the Underworld. Aeneas enters a cave that leads to the Underworld at a place called Avernus—the birdless place.

Like Odysseus in *The Odyssey,* Aeneas encounters the ghosts of his past. The helmsman Palinurus tells him that he was drowned after slipping from the ship and begs for his body to be recovered and buried properly.

He hears the crying of the children who died too young, and the wails of those wrongfully condemned to death and those who had committed suicide.

He sees Dido there and realizes that she had taken her own life. Her shade would not look at him nor listen to his apologies. She turns away from him angry and returns to the shade of her dead husband.

The Sybil shows Aeneas the glade of happiness where the souls of the blessed reside. He sees Orpheus playing his lyre and is shown the line of Teucer, Ilius, Assaracus, and Dardanus, the founder of Troy. Aeneas sees his father Anchises. He tries to embrace him, but he slips three times through his fingers (just as Odysseus had tried to hold his mother). Anchises then shows his son the future descendents of Rome.

- Silvius – The son of Ascanius who will rule in Alba Longa
- Procas – An Alban King
- Capys – Another Alban King
- Numitor – Father of Romulus and Remus
- Romulus – Founder of Rome
- Julius Caesar
- Augustus

Aeneas in Italy

Book Seven

The Trojans reach the mouth of the Tiber and are received by King Latinus, who promises his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas. Juno causes trouble and stirs up violent passions in queen Amata and Turnus—the spurned suitor of Lavinia. War breaks out and Virgil lists the Italian forces on each side. These later books of the Aeneid reflect Homer's *The Iliad.*

Book Eight

Aeneas goes to find Evander to seek his help. The Arcadian king has settled in the future site of Rome. He promises that his son Pallas will lead an army to help in the war.

Venus has Vulcan make Aeneas new armor just as Thetis had done for Achilles in *The Iliad.* Aeneas's armor includes a great shield painted with scenes illustrating the future of Rome:

- The she-wolf with Romulus and Remus
- The Sabine Women
- Romulus and Remus as adults founding Rome
- The Alban King Mettus, who broke a treaty with Rome, being torn apart by two chariots
- Larns Porsena telling the Romans to take back Tarquin
- Horatius Cocles holding the bridge
- Manlius guarding the Capitol from the Gauls
- A goose honking the alarm at a group of Gauls
- Celebrants at the Lupercalia
- The gates of Hades with Cataline hanging over a gorge
- Cato seated as a law-giver
- The battle of Actium with Augustus onboard his flagship
- Agrippa, Augustus's admiral
- Antony presiding over his Eastern spoils
- Antony's Egyptian wife—described as shameful
- Caesar presiding over a vast triumph surveying the gifts of nations
- A long procession of subject people

Books Nine through Twelve

These books, like *The Iliad,* feature great battles and heroic single combats. Pallas is killed by Mezentius. Aeneas in revenge kills Mezentius and his son Lausus. Funeral rites are held for Pallas, and the woman warrior Camilla is killed.

Finally, in book twelve, a truce is declared and a duel between Aeneas and Turnus to decide the war is decided on. But the truce is broken and fighting resumes. On Mt. Olympus, Juno is reconciled with the Trojans as long as the Italians will share the power of Rome. Aeneas finally overpowers Turnus and he begs for mercy. Aeneas is angered when he sees Turnus wearing the insignia of Pallas and kills him.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What happens to Aeneas in the Underworld?
2. Name some of the scenes decorating the great shield of Aeneas.

Suggested Reading

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Other Books of Interest

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Lecture 13:
Ovid

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a new translation by Charles Martin).

Ovid's Life and Works

Publius Ovidius Naso was born in 43 BCE at the town of Sulmo (Sulmona) in the Abruzzi region of Italy. He was the son of a family of knights and was sent to Rome for his education.

He studied rhetoric and toured throughout Greece. After holding a few minor local government posts, he embarked on a career as a poet under the patronage of Valerius Messalla Corvinus.

By 8 CE, he was one of the leading poets in Rome. In that same year, he was banished by Augustus to the distant outpost of Tomis on the Black Sea coast. This may have been for publishing his erotic love poetry *Ars Amatoria,* which advocated adultery and seemingly went against the new moral codes being established by Augustus in Rome. Ovid remained in Tomis until his death in 17 ACE.

All of Ovid's poetry, with the exception of the *Metamorphoses,* was written in elegiac couplets. His works include the following:

Amores ("Loves"): Three books of elegies, seemingly autobiographical accounts of the poet's own amorous adventures. Ovid uses myth to erotic and humorous effect in detailing aspects of his love life, particularly with a married woman named Corinna.

Heroides ("Heroines"): A collection of fourteen fictitious letters from famous mythological heroines to their absent husbands or lovers. These include Phaedra to Hippolytus, Ariadne to Theseus, Penelope to Ulysses, and Dido to Aeneas.

Ars Amatoria ("The Art of Love") was a poetic guide to philandering in Rome. It is full of advice on how to have an affair, how to engage in sexual banter, rules of courtship, and erotic tips. Books one and two advise men on women and book three advises women on men. There are many mythological allusions employed here.

The sequel to this work was entitled *Remedia Amoris* ("Remedies of Love") and instructed readers how to get out of a love affair. One farcical use of mythological content was to list some famously tragic love affairs and demonstrate that they would never have happened if he had been able to advise the people involved. Dido, Medea, Tereus, Pasiphae, and Paris are among the characters featured.

This use of myth has been called *exempla.* In *Amores,* the poet is trying to persuade a wealthy woman to prolong their affair. He tells her he is a poet and loyal, although poor, and then compares his role in their relationship to

several mythological characters, such as the lovers of Io, Europa, and Leda. But the humor lies in the fact that Ovid is referring to Jupiter, a god not known for his staying power when it comes to long-term relationships. Ovid frequently uses the communal understanding of certain mythological motifs for ironic purposes.

The *Fasti* ("Calendar") is a poetical calendar of the Roman year with one book for each month. Only six books, January through June, survive, and the work was never completed. This work seems to have been undertaken to please Augustus, who was busy restoring the Roman religious cults and rites and placing them at the center of civic life. The *Fasti* contains fascinating insights to the often-varied rites and practices of the Romans, including important information on the foundation myths of Rome and the early kings. Much of our information of the Lupercalia comes from Ovid's *Fasti.*

Metamorphoses ("Transformations")

This is a work of fifteen books in hexameters composed just before Ovid's exile in 8 CE, a collection of stories from classical Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern myth each alluding to a physical transformation in some form or another. The whole poem raises questions about the difference between human and divine, animal and inanimate, and the idea of the nature of the natural order and the world around us.

Ovid seems influenced by earlier Greek works such as Callimachus's *Aetia,* a poetic explanation of myths, rituals, and divine images. Nicander of Colophon also collected mythical metamorphoses.

Ovid begins *Metamorphoses* with his version of the creation myth:

Before the seas and lands had been created
Before the sky that covers everything
Nature displayed a single aspect only
Throughout the cosmos; Chaos was its name
A shapeless, unwrought mass of inert bulk
And nothing more, with the discordant seeds
Of disconnected elements all heaped
Together in anarchic disarray.

This could be an introduction to the structure of *Metamorphoses* itself, as Ovid is less interested in explaining myth but is instead letting myths unfold as they reveal each change. Ovid is using mythology to underpin a poetic form, and yet his attitude to myths and the vast array of mythological sources on display in *Metamorphoses* must indicate a high level of mythological comprehension among the Romans, or at least the Roman elite.

Much of the first book seems to mirror Hesiod's *Theogony* with its journey through the elements of the Greek creation stories, including the ages of man, the great flood, the battle with the giants, and the origin of many religious institutions.

Phaeton

The story of Phaeton seems almost a cautionary tale as Ovid tells us how the mortal son of Helios the sun god asked his divine father to prove his love by promising anything he asked. Phaeton asked to drive the chariot of the sun. Helios begged him not to, but the rash boy would not listen. There was no way a mere mortal could ever steer the chariot or control the divine horses. Soon enough, Phaeton was out of control as the sun scorched the earth, creating deserts, burning humans, evaporating rivers and seas until finally Phaeton caught fire and transformed into a comet in the sky.

Echo and Narcissus

Some transformations are truly tragic, such as the myth of Echo and Narcissus. The beautiful young man Narcissus had no interest in love and was consumed with his self image. At that time, the nymph Echo had a body as well as a voice and fell madly in love with Narcissus. But Juno hated Echo and decided to punish her, as she always used her voice to call the alarm and protect Zeus when he dallied with one of the nymphs.

Echo saw Narcissus in the woods one day and, unable to speak until spoken to, she responded when he said “Anyone here?” with an excited “Here!” Narcissus saw no one and called again “Come!” He heard the same cry returned. He shouted, “Why do you run away from me?” His words were returned. Finally, in desperation, Echo revealed herself and tried to embrace him, but Narcissus fled. “You’ll never have your way with me,” he cried. “Have your way with me,” she called back. Echo wasted away in the forest, pining for Narcissus. Her flesh shriveled and her skeleton turned to stone. Now only her voice remains trapped forever and forlorn.

Finally, one of his Narcissus’s spurned lovers cried out, “May he himself love as I have loved him—an unrequited love!” Her wish was granted and Narcissus fell in love with his own image as he leaned over a pool to drink the cool water. But he could not kiss or touch the face in the pool, though he kept trying in vain. He could not move from that spot, as he was transfixed, obsessed. He beat himself red in frustration and wasted away. Even in death, he could not bear to take his eyes from his own reflection as he crossed the river Styx, gazing into the depths. Instead of his remains, the Nymphs who came to bury him found only a flower with white petals around a pallid saffron-colored center.

The Influence of Ovid

Although Ovid’s work may not reveal a great deal about the function of myth historically or socially, his influence in the reception of Greek and Roman mythology was enormous. The medieval poets were influenced greatly by his work, as was Dante, Chaucer, Golding, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, Milton, and recently Ted Hughes. Ovid’s collection of mythological stories also had a great effect on Renaissance art and the vogue for mythological allegorical subjects.

Pyramus and Thisbe

We can track the influence of Ovid and how he conveyed popular mythology by looking at one particular story from the *Metamorphoses*: the legend of

Pyramus and Thisbe. The story is told in book four by mythological characters themselves, the daughters of Minyas. While all Thebes is celebrating the rites of Dionysus, the daughters stay at home weaving and telling stories to pass the time. All their tales have romantic themes: the lovers of Helios, Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, and Pyramus and Thisbe. At the end of their storytelling session, the daughters are turned into bats as punishment for denying the cult of Dionysus.

Ovid seems to have taken the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe from a much earlier unknown source, possibly Middle Eastern, as the story takes place in Babylon. Ovid's tale explains why the myrtle bush has red berries. Pyramus is a handsome young man and Thisbe a beautiful princess. They lived in Babylon, a city surrounded by a large brick wall, and they too were separated by such a wall.

They would meet at a chink in the wall where they would whisper sweet nothings, but became frustrated that they could never kiss. So one night they agreed to steal away from the city and meet at a secret rendezvous, the tomb of the hero Ninus, outside the city gates where a mulberry bush grew.

Thisbe arrives first and waits, but sees a ferocious lioness. She runs into a nearby cave, but drops her cloak. The lioness picks it up and covers it in the blood of a recent kill before discarding it. Pyramus arrives, sees the mangled garment, and assumes that his love has been killed. He takes his sword and kills himself, spraying dark blood on the myrtle, which becomes the red berries. Thisbe leaves the cave and sees the strange fruit on the tree and then her love dead on the ground. Now Thisbe takes his blade and kills herself, mingling her blood with his.

Ovid to Chaucer to Shakespeare

In the fourteenth century, the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer took Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe and placed it in his *Knight's Tale.* This popular story was also known to Shakespeare, who would have been well aware of the famous Chaucerian version written in Middle English. Shakespeare probably was also familiar with Ovid. The myth of Pyramus and Thisbe is repeated in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* produced in London in 1596.

Here the mechanicals led by the rambunctious Nick Bottom the Weaver present a dramatic rendition of the myth for the Athenian court of Theseus on the occasion of his wedding to the Amazon Queen Hippolyta. To great comic effect, in a scene that still delights today, the ham amateur actors maul their performances wonderfully. When Bottom, playing Pyramus, sees the blood-stained garment of Thisbe, he speaks:

Sweet moon I thank you for thy sunny beams
I thank thee moon for shining now so bright
For by thy gracious golden glittering streams
I trust to taste of truest Thisby's sight.
But stay—o spite!
But mark—poor knight!

What dreadful dole is here?
Eyes do you see?
How can it be?
O dainty duck! O Dear!
Thy mantle good,
What! stained with blood?
Approach ye furies fell!
O fates! Come, come.
Cut thread and thrum;
Quail rush conclude and quell!

This die I, thus, thus, thus,
Now I am dead
Now I am fled
My soul is in the sky
Tongue loose thy might!
Moon take thy flight!
Now die, die, die, die, die!

The Apotheosis of Julius Caesar

Ovid closes his *Metamorphoses* with a final transformation—that of Julius Caesar from a man to a god by way of his appearance as a comet in the sky at the moment of his death. This allusion was strategically placed to please the adopted son of Caesar, Rome's ruling power, Augustus Caesar. But it seems too little too late and despite his many appeals, Ovid was left banished to the Black Sea and died in Tomis in 17 CE.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. What is *exempla*?
2. What questions are raised by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*?

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Lecture 14:
The Survival of Classical Myth

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read John Boardman's (et al) *The Oxford History of the Roman World* (chapter 17: "Envoi: Taking Leave of Antiquity").

Imperial Rome

Rome's first "Emperor," Augustus Caesar, died in 14 CE, and within a month he was deified as a god. Augustus knew just how much political and social power could be manufactured from the development of his image set against a background of Roman and Greek mythology.

A new imperial iconography developed borrowing from Greek mythology, in which the Roman rulers were depicted as Hellenic gods. The beautiful Gemma Augustea, now in Vienna, shows the godlike Augustus seated on a throne holding a scepter and crowned with laurel. He is depicted like a muscular young man in the Greek style, and he resembles a new Zeus as he looks over at his successor Tiberius arriving in a chariot. Below this scene, the artists carved a group of Roman soldiers erecting a trophy surrounded by captured and thoroughly subdued barbarian enemies.

The fascination with all things Greek, particularly mythology and literature, grew during the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty in Rome. There was a strong Greek influence at the imperial household and the conquest of the Mediterranean world and the stabilization of the empire under Augustus had introduced a new wave of Hellenistic influence to Rome.

Tiberius adorned his houses with Greek art and spent much of his time either on the Greek island of Rhodes or at his palace on Capri, a small island off the bay of Naples in south Italy, which had been an area of major Greek influence.

Tiberius's successor was the infamous Caligula ("Little Boots"), or Gaius Iulius Caesar Germanicus (37-41). He cast himself more as a Hellenistic divine potentate than a Roman emperor, and one story even goes so far as to tell of how the mad Caligula had an incestuous relationship with his sisters, and when he impregnated one, he tore the baby from her womb and ate it, just as Cronus had done with Zeus.

The short and ill-fated reign of Caligula ended in his assassination at the hands of his guards. His successor, Claudius (41-54), was a scholar interested in the Etruscans and the history of Rome. He was closely advised by a staff of learned Greeks and was well schooled in mythology and literature.

The next emperor Nero's (54-68) fascination with ancient myth went so far as to see him dress in theatrical costume and recite his entire Trojan Epic "The Sack of Ilium" during the great fire of Rome—leading to the development of another great legend, that Nero "fiddled" while Rome burned.

After the death of Nero in 68 CE, Rome was plunged once more into civil war until a strong military leader called Vespasian took control in 69 CE. This new

Flavian dynasty imagined itself as the inheritors of the old republican ideal of Rome, solid stoic values, and the banishment of Eastern luxury. This led to a neo-conservative culture under both Titus (79-81) and Domitian (81–96).

The Flavians were followed by the Antonines and a revival of interest in Greek literature, art, architecture, and mythology. Trajan's (98-117) great monument to his victories in Dacia, "Trajan's Arch," is rendered in a Hellenistic style with many of the scenes of Roman soldiers in battle reflecting the mythological combats of Greek art. Greek literature thrived with orators such as Dio Chrysostom, philosophers such as Epictetus, and biographers such as Plutarch finding a welcome home in the Rome of Trajan.

Hadrian (117-138) was a great philhellene, dedicating a great temple to Zeus in Athens called the Olympieum and taking the title "Olympius" for himself. He was initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries, sacred Athenian rites to Demeter and Kore, and founded a new league of Greek city-states called the Panhellion.

Hadrian also completed construction on the Pantheon in Rome begun by Trajan. This colossal temple to the planetary gods of Rome depicted in Greek style survives today mainly due to its conversion to a Christian basilica. Hadrian was even nicknamed "Greekling" by his more conservative Roman detractors and his attempt at building a temple to Venus in Rome in the Greek form was met with derision. But Hadrian's Hellenizing can be clearly seen in the sculpture of the period, which also helped to revive an active interest in mythological subjects. His grand villa at Tivoli, built in the style of a Greek palace, was perhaps the most opulent sign of Hadrian's fascination with all things Greek.

The Transmission of Classical Myth

Mythological Changes in Classical Greece

In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, in the Greek world, traditional attitudes toward mythology and religion began to change. This was due to several important factors:

There were new developments in philosophical thought that questioned preconceived notions and dogmatic beliefs. Anaximenes of Miletus believed that the supreme element was air and named it *theos* (god). Heraclitus of Ephesus questioned animal sacrifice and thought fire the prime element, and Xenophanes of Colophone went so far as to rail against the Homeric gods as wicked and cruel.

The teachings of the Sophists in Athens in the fifth century BCE created further questions, as did the investigations of Socrates, who was condemned to death in 399 BCE for "preaching that the gods do not exist and corrupting the young." The works of his successors, Plato and then Aristotle, helped to establish Athens as an educational center of the Mediterranean world and spread Greek concepts and cultural ideas.

Athenian fifth-century drama also took mythological themes and used them as metaphorical expressions of contemporary political and social questions of the day. The Theban tyrant Oedipus was portrayed by Sophocles in a manner that could be seen to allude to the Athenian leader Pericles. The great myth of the House of Atreus was retold by Aeschylus and its horrific curses transported to Athens, where they are mediated by the new democratic insti-

tution of the law-court. The comic dramatist Aristophanes placed his gods on stage with his actors, poking wicked fun at Athenian institutions and mythological ideas.

In the fourth century, there was a marked decline in citizen loyalty to the city-state caused by political strife and almost constant warfare. Religious concerns shifted from the public to the personal as people sought individual comfort from the trials of daily life. There was a huge growth in initiation into popular mystery cults such as the Eleusinian mysteries and the cult of Dionysus. Mythology became important in the communication of cult practices and beliefs and took on a new meaning in the lives of ordinary Greeks.

The Hellenistic World

The Macedonian king Alexander the Great conquered Greece, and prior to his death in 323 BCE, he had united Greek genius and military prowess and turned it on the East in a seven-year campaign that took him from Egypt to India. As he conquered, he built Greek cities in his new territories and spread the Greek language, culture, and mythology. From 323 to the Roman annexation of Greece in 146 BCE, that Hellenistic period saw a huge growth in the influence of Greek ideas.

This dissemination of Greek culture led to the development of new ways of communicating and cataloging Hellenic concepts, in particular the spread of the written word and the fashion for collecting texts. Libraries, both public and private, became widespread and the huge library in Alexandria in Egypt was legendary for its enormous collection of papyrus scrolls.

Hand in hand with the new technology of the text came the classification and codifying of Greek mythology. Callimachus wrote a treatise called *Aetia* (Causes) that sought to list and explain popular mythology. Apollonius of Rhodes wrote a work detailing the myth of Jason called *The Voyage of the Argo,* and Theocritus of Cos wrote on both Herakles and Jason. Here myth took on a secondary use, as literary allusion and allegory.

Euhemerism

Euhemerus (ca. 300 BCE) wrote a text called the *Sacred History* in which he claims to have traveled to the Indian Ocean to an island called Panchea. He said he saw there a golden pillar in a temple of Zeus inscribed with the deeds of the gods, and that they were originally mortal kings and heroes. Euhemerism was an early attempt to explain mythology with etiological reasoning, and the works of Euhemerus had a great effect on the more pragmatic Roman period writers such as Diodorus Sicilius.

Euhemerus was translated into Latin by Ennius in 180 BCE, and St. Augustine used Euhemerus as an example of the flaws within Paganism in the *City of God* (ca. 415), preserving his views in early Christian texts.

Astrology

Eastern astrological traditions blended with Greek mythology during the Hellenistic period when Greek culture came into direct contact with the East and astral symbols were given Greek mythological names.

The *Astronimica* of Manilius (early first century CE) alludes to many myths

but states that the traditions of Homer do not go far enough and a knowledge of astral patterns will "extend the bounds."

Ptolemy, writing in 140 CE, published his astrological work *Tetrabiblos,* which continued the trend of blending Greek myth with Eastern astrology.

Although St. Augustine attacked astrology in his *City of God,* he accepted it had a place in daily life, although it was secondary to God and human free will. This helped the mythic names survive.

Ovid

Ovid had a profound influence on the literature of the Middle Ages. His poems were used as morality tales and often changed to reflect contemporary ideas.

One example is the *Ovid Moralise*, a French version of the work from the fourteenth century.

This section interprets the legend of Apollo and Daphne and her transformation into the laurel.

Here we may suppose that by the maiden Daphne is meant the glorious Virgin Mary, whom God the father chose to conceive his only son by the work of the Holy Spirit. She carried him for nine months and then bore him. Virgin before the birth, virgin after the birth she remained. The sovereign virgin is the laurel, always green in virtue, that god planted in the garden of his paradise.

Ovid was also translated by the English writer William Caxton in 1480 in a work entitled *Ovyde Hys Booke of Methamorphose*.

Arthur Golding translated *Metamorphoses* into English in 1567, and this was the text used by Shakespeare.

Metamorphoses may have also been one of the first books completed in America. An Englishman called George Sandys published a new English translation in 1626. Sandys was a treasurer of the Virginia Company and started his version while sailing to Virginia. He finished it while living in the new colony of Jamestown. He returned to England in 1626 to publish the work.

Ovid had a great influence on the English writers Ben Johnson, Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser.

The Trojan War Transmitted

In 1160, a French writer, Benoit Ste. Maure, compiled a work in Old French called *Roman de Troie,* a 30,000-line romance detailing the voyage of the *Argo,* the story of Troy, and the death of Odysseus.

In England in 1184, Joseph of Exeter wrote *De Bello Trojano,* a Latin version of a forged text said to have been written by a Phrygian called Dares who witnessed the fall of Troy.

Around 1380, Chaucer used this version to inspire his poem *Troilus and Criseyde,* which in turn inspired Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida.*

Ste. Maure's tales of the Trojan War also became the first book printed in English. *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* by William Caxton was completed in 1471. This was a translation of a French text by Raul Le Fevre that had in turn been translated from the Old French of Ste. Benoit's *Roman de Troie.*

Greece and Rome in Medieval Europe

Dante

In his *Divine Comedy*, the great Italian poet Dante (1256-1321) used Virgil as his guide in the Inferno and named Homer, Socrates, Ulysses, Minos, and other mythological figures as examples of shades residing in the nine circles of Hell. In the ninth circle, closest to Satan, Dante depicts Brutus and Cassius, alongside Judas, being eternally chewed in the mouth of Lucifer as the great betrayers.

Chaucer

Chaucer also used classical mythology as a starting point for his *Canterbury Tales.* The Italian scholar Boccaccio (1313-1375) wrote an epic poem called *Teseida* dealing with the myth of the Seven Against Thebes and the Athenian hero Theseus.

Chaucer used this poem as his primary source for "The Knight's Tale," written around 1387. This draws on the myth of the Seven Against Thebes and tells of how the widows of the slain seven Argive warriors go to Athens and ask Theseus to help them. Chaucer makes Theseus a duke and portrays him in a medieval light. This was Shakespeare's inspiration for the character of Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Essays & Questions

1. In the Greek world of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, why did traditional attitudes toward mythology and religion begin to change?
2. Describe the influence of Ovid on literature in the Middle Ages.

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